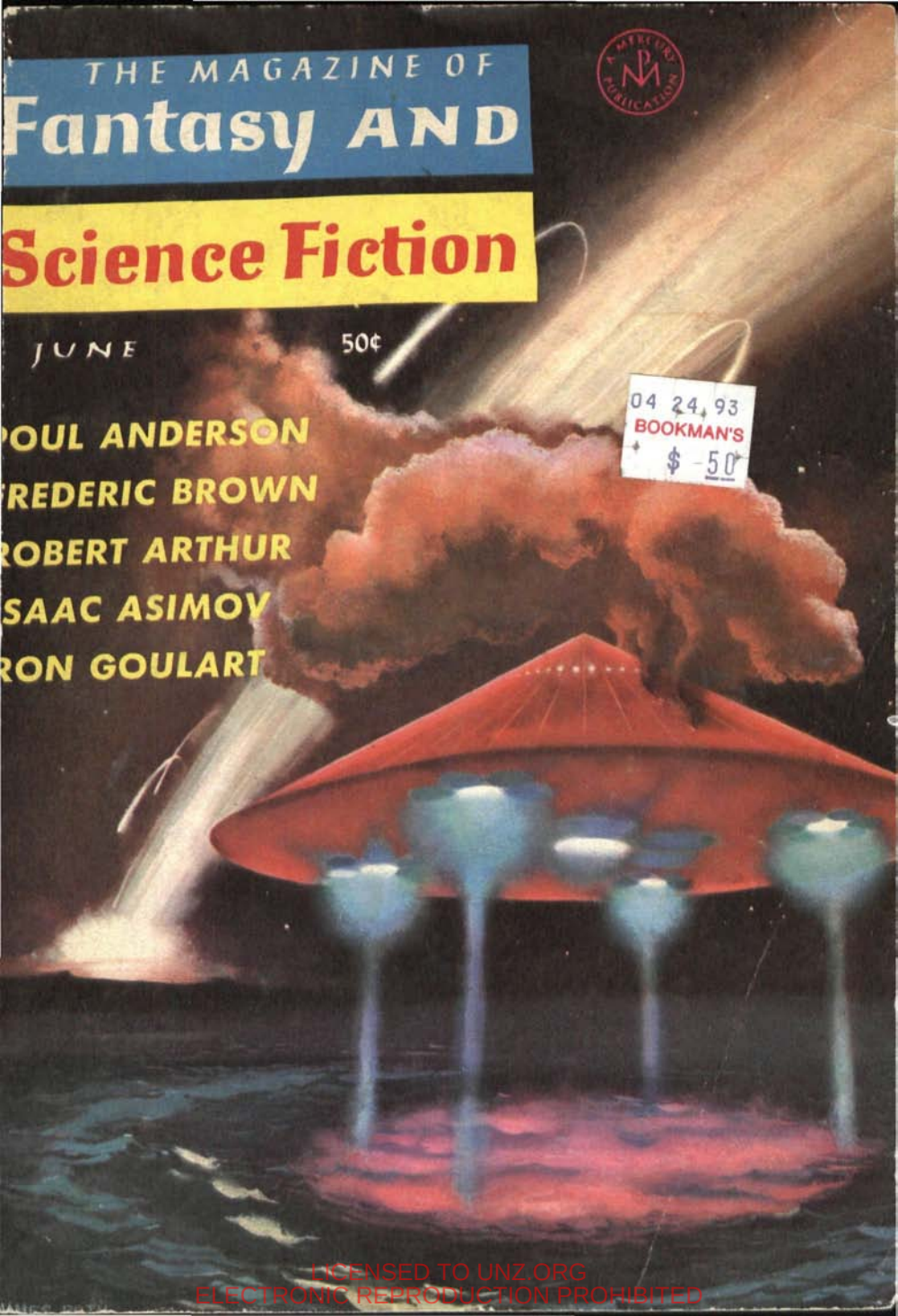

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JUNE

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Below appears the final novel in Poul Anderson's privateer trilogy. Though a sequel to MARQUE AND REPRISAL (Feb. 1965) and ARSENAL PORT (April 1965), ADMIRALTY is a complete *short novel—deepspace adventure at its imaginative best. The scene: a hostile region one hundred and fifty light-years from Earth, where the dominion of man is championed by one ship and a crew with the will to fight.*

ADMIRALTY

by Poul Anderson

CONSIDER HIS PROBLEM. THE Phoenix region lay a hundred and fifty-odd light-years from Sol. The only human settlement in it was the French colony planet New Europe, circling the sun Aurore. Alerion had seized this and was rapidly building orbital defenses which would make it impregnable. Gunnar Heim had one ship. *Fox* II was, indeed, a cruiser, her gravitrons capable of fantastic acceleration, her automated armament able to curtain her in laser energy and nuclear hellfire while directing a fatal slash through an enemy's similar defense. But she was alone, a privateer commissioned on a technicality. Her men had signed on less for loot than for the sake of striking at man's old foe. However, she could only resupply by selling her captures. Thus every Aleriona vessel she took drained her strength. The prize crews could not return and rendezvous, when *Fox* depended for survival on unpredictable motion through immensity. No news came from home. And that, slowly, wore down men's spirits.

The prisoners he interviewed continued to tell Heim that Earth had not moved, that the World Federation Navy was still merely glaring at Alerion's, out on the Marches. He believed them. As the months passed, his own hope faded.

Yet he was doing tremendous damage. Aurore was not so close to The Eith either. The occupiers of New Europe sat at the end of a long supply line; and they could not spare much bottom for this garrison, when Earth's superior

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force *might* strike. Heim had not killed anybody—he was proud of that—but he had sent valuable personnel off to internment; he had grabbed ships and material that were sorely missed; he tied up an unholy number of warcraft on convoy duty and the hunt for him. In the end, Alerion sent one of the best naval minds it had, to deal with the situation. The newcomer started arming unescorted cargo carriers.

Fox encountered only one such Q-boat. Had the human crew been less carefully picked and trained, it could have been the end of her. As it was, she reacted smoothly to the surprise, warded off everything that was cast, and laid the enemy under her guns. *Meroeth*'s captain surrendered.

In a way, though, he had accomplished his purpose. None realized it, but Gunnar Heim's raiding was at an end.

I

Joy filled the ship, where she lay far outsystem with her captive. This was more than another success. There had been humans aboard *Meroeth,* who were now set free.

The mess seethed with men. Only twenty-five privateers remained, and a dozen New Europeans, in a room that had once held a hundred; but they seemed to overflow it, shouting, singing, clashing their glasses, until the bulkheads trembled. Endre Vadasz—wanderfooted troubadour of space, sworn brother to his captain—leaped onto a table. His slim body poised while his fingers flew across the guitar strings. More and more of the French began to sing with him:

"C'est une fleur, fleur de prairie,

C'est une belle Rose de Provence—"

At first Heim was laughing too loudly at Jean Irribarne's last joke to hear. Then the music grew, and it took him. He remembered a certain night in Bonne Chance. Suddenly he was there again. Roofs peaked around the garden, black under the stars, but the yellow light from windows joined the light of Diane rising full. A small wind rustled the shrubs, to mingle scents of rose and lily with unnamed pungencies from native blooms. Madelon's hand was trusting in his. Gravel scrunched beneath their feet as they walked toward the summerhouse. And somewhere someone was playing a tape, this very song drifted down the warm air, earthy and loving.

"—Sa jolie taille ronde et gracieuse

Comme une vague souple et mysterieuse."

His eyes stung. He shook his head harshly.

Irribarne gave him a close look.

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The New European was medium tall, spare of build, dark-haired, long-headed, and clean-featured. He still wore the garments in which he had been captured, green tunic and trousers, soft boots, beret tucked in scaly leather belt, the uniform of a planetary constabulary turned maquisard. Lieutenant's bars gleamed on his shoulders.

"Pourquoi cette tristesse soudaine?"

"Eh?" Heim blinked. Between the racket in here, the rustiness of his French, and the fact that New Europe was well on the way to evolving its own dialect, he didn't understand.

"You show at once the trouble," Irribarne said. Enough English speakers visited his planet, in the lost days, that town dwellers usually had some command of their language.

"Oh . . . nothing. A memory. I spent several grand leaves on New Europe, when I was a Navy man. But that was—Judas, that was twenty-one years ago."

"And so you think of aliens that slither through streets made empty of men. How they move softly, like hunting panthers!" Irribarne scowled into his glass and drained it in a convulsive gesture. "Or perhaps you remember a girl, and wonder if she is dead or else hiding in the forests. *Hein?*"

"Let's get refills," said Heim brusquely.

Irribarne laid a hand on his arm. *"Un moment, s'il vous plait.* The population of the whole planet is only five hundred thousand. The city people, that you would meet, they are much less. Perhaps I know."

"Madelon Dubois?"

"From Bonne Chance in origin? Her father a doctor? But yes! She married my own brother Pierre. They live, what last I heard."

Darkness passed before Heim. *"Gud ske lov,"* he breathed: as close to a prayer as he had come since childhood.

Irribarne considered him. The captain was a huge man, two meters in height, blocky of shoulders and face, roan-haired eyes wintry blue; but on this instant he looked curiously helpless. "Ah, this matters to you. Come, shall we not speak alone?"

"All right. Thanks." Heim led the way to his cabin. When he shut the door, the noise of song and belling chords was chopped off as if they had entered another universe.

Irribarne sat down and glanced about the neat, compact room, the books, a model of a warship, pictures of a woman and a girl. *"Votre famille?"* he asked.

"Yes. My wife's dead, though. Daughter's with her grandfather on Earth." Heim took his glance away from Lisa's image. At fourteen, she might have changed un-

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recognizably by the time he got back. If he ever did. He offered one of his few remaining cigars and began to stuff a pipe for himself. His fingers were not absolutely steady. "How is your own family?"

"Well, thank you. Of course, that was a pair of weeks ago, when my force was captured." Irribarne got his cigar going and leaned back with a luxurious sigh. Heim stayed on his feet.

"How'd that happen, anyway? We've had no real chance to talk."

"Bad luck, I hope. We set out to blow up a uranium mine on the Cote Notre Dame that the Aleriona were exploiting. We found a sport submarine, for we know that the one thing those damned dryworlders do not have is submarine detection equipment. But the mine was better guarded than we expected. When we surfaced to go ashore at night, a shell hit. Chemical explosive only, or I would not sit here. Their troopers had, you say, the drop when we swam to land. There was talk about shooting us for an example, or what is worse to squeeze information from us. But the new high commander heard and forbid. Instead, we were going to Alerion. They spoke about prisoner exchange."

"I see."

"But you make stalls. It is news of Madelon you wish, no?"

"Hell, I hate to get personal—Okay. We were in love, when I had a long leave on New Europe. Very innocent affair, I assure you. So damned innocent, in fact, that I shied away a bit and—Anyhow, next time I came back she'd moved."

"Indeed so. To Chateau de St. Jacques. I thought always Pierre got her . . . on the rebound? Now and then she has laughed about the big *Norwegien* when she was a girl. Such laughter, half happy, half sad, one always makes of young memories." Irribarne's gaze grew stiff. "Pierre is a good husband. They have four children."

Heim flushed. "Don't misunderstand me," he said around his pipe. "I couldn't have married better than I did either. It was just—she was in trouble, and I hoped I could help. Old friendship, nothing else."

He didn't believe he was lying. He had organized this expedition out of a conviction that Earth must strike back now, rather than wait for the enemy's strength to grow. A few other thoughts had crossed his mind, but they were not unduly painful to bury. The more so, he admitted, when he knew that Jocelyn Lawrie was waiting for him; and she was a fine, handsome, altogether satisfying woman, no longer young, of course, but then neither was he. Or Madelon.

"You have that from us all," Ir-

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ribarne said heartily. "Now tell me more before we return to the festival. Why are you here in only one ship? When does the Navy come?"

God help me, Heim thought, *I wanted to spare them till tomorrow.*

"I don't know," he said.

"Nom d'un chien!" Irribarne sat bolt upright. "What is it that you say?"

Slowly, Heim dragged the tale from himself: how an honest wish for peace had been tangled with cowardice and the will to believe until most of Earth's powerful refused to credit the plain evidence of Alerion's intention to drive man out of space. After the clash at New Europe, the Federation fell over itself in eagerness to accept an offer of negotiation. One ranking delegate, Admiral Cynbe ru Taren himself, had privately admitted to Heim that his government only planned to consolidate its gains before making the next move; but whom could Gunnar Heim, the despised extremist warmonger, get to believe that? Endre Vadasz bummed his way home with an eyewitness account of what had really happened—and heard his proofs dismissed as fraudulent. Most of those who sat in the seats of the mighty were so afraid of war that they must believe Alerion spoke truly in claiming that New Europe had been accidentally depopulated in the course of a naval incident that got out of hand. They concluded that no planet of corpses was worth the lives that revenge would cost and that nothing mattered except to reduce tension; they set out to negotiate a settlement that would give the whole Phoenix to Alerion.

France, almost alone in her anger, showed Parliament that willy-nilly, according to law Earth was at war; and France gave Heim letters of marque and Heim got away before he could be stopped. But no further action followed, the Deepspace Fleet lay chained and muzzled while Parliament wrangled, quite possibly nothing except *Fox*'s buccaneering prevented a resumption of those talks which to Alerion were only a more effective kind of war.

"Mais . . . mais . . . mais . . . vous—cette astronef—" Irribarne checked his stutter, caught breath, and said carefully, "This ship has ranged in the Auroran System. Have you, yourself, taken no proof we live?"

"I tried," Heim said. Back and forth he paced, smoke fuming, heels banging, big useless hands clasped behind his back till the nails stood white. "The prisoners that went home with my prizes, they could have been interrogated. Not easily; Aleriona don't respond like humans; but somebody could've ripped the truth from them! I guess nobody did.

"I also made a pass by New

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Europe. Not hard to do, if you're quick. Most of their defense satellites still aren't equipped, and we detected no warships too close to outrun. So I got photographs, nice clear ones, showing plainly that only Coeur d'Yvonne was destroyed, that there never had been a firestorm across Garance. Sent them back to Earth. I suppose they convinced some people, but evidently not the right ones. Don't forget, by now a lot of political careers are bound up with the peace issue. And even a man who might confess he was wrong and resign, if it only involved himself, will hesitate to drag his party down with him.

"Oh, I'm sure sentiment has moved in our favor. It'd already begun to do so when I left. Not long after, at Staurn for munitions, I met some latecomers from Earth. They told me the will to fight was becoming respectable. But that was four months ago!"

He shifted his pipe, stopped his feet, and went on more evenly: "I can guess what the next line of argument has been for the appeasement faction. 'Yes, yes,' they say, 'maybe the New Europeans still are alive. So isn't the most important thing to rescue them? We won't do that by war. Alerion can wipe them out any time she chooses. We have to trade their planet for their lives.' That's probably being said in Parliament tonight."

Irribarne's chin sank on his breast. "*Un demi million d'hommes,*" he mumbled. Abruptly: "But they will die all the same. Can one not see that? We have only a few more weeks."

"What?" Heim bellowed. His heart jolted him. "Is the enemy fixing to burn you out?"

That could be done quite easily, he knew in horror. *A thousand or so megatons exploded at satellite height on a clear day will set a good part of a continent afire. Madelon!*

"No, no," the colonist said. "They need for themselves the resources of the planet, in fortifying the system. A continental firestorm or a radioactive poisoning, that would make large trouble for them too. But the vitamin C."

Piece by piece, the story came out. Never doubting Earth would hurry to their aid, the seaboard folk of Pays d'Espoir refused to surrender and fled inland, to the mountains and forests of the Haute Garance. That nearly unmapped wilderness was as rich in game and edible vegetation as North America before the white man. With a high technology and no population pressure, the people were wealthy; hardly a one did not own hunting, fishing, and camping gear, as well as a flyer capable of going anywhere. Given a little camouflage and caution, fifty thousand scattered lodges and summer cottages were much too

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many for the Aleriona to find. On the rare occasions when it did happen, one could resort to tent or cave or lean-to.

Portable chargers, equally able to use sunlight, wind, or running water, were also standard outdoor equipment, that kept up power cells. Ordinary miniature transceivers maintained a communications net. It did the enemy scant good to monitor. He had come with people that knew French, but his own ossified culture had not allowed for provincial dialect, *Louchebeme*, or Basque. The boldest men organized raids on him, the rest stayed hidden.

With little axial tilt, New Europe enjoys a mild and rainy winter in the temperate zone, even at fairly high altitudes. It seemed that the humans could hold out indefinitely.

But they were not, after all, on Earth. Life had arisen and evolved separately here, through two or three billion years. Similar conditions led to similar chemistry. Most of what a man needed he could get from native organisms. But similarity is not identity. Some things were lacking on New Europe, notably vitamin C. The escapers had packed along a supply of pills. Now the store was very low. Alerion held the farmlands where Terrestrial plants grew, the towns where the biochemical factories stood.

Scurvy is a slow killer, working its way through gums, muscles, digestion, blood, bones. Most often the victim dies of something else which he no longer has the strength to resist. But one way or another, he dies.

"And they know it," Irribarne grated. "Those devils, they know our human weakness. They need only wait." He lifted one fist. "Has Earth forgotten?"

"No," Heim said. "It'd be bound to occur to somebody. But Earth's so confused. . . ."

"Let us go there," Irribarne said. "I myself, all my men, we are witnesses. Can we not shame them till they move?"

"I don't know," Heim said in wretchedness. "We can try, of course. But—maybe I'm being paranoid—but I can still imagine the arguments. 'Nothing except negotiation can save you. Alerion will not negotiate unless we make prompt concessions.'"

"I know damn well that once inside the Solar System, *Fox* won't be allowed to leave again. The law, you see; only units under the Peace Authority can have nuclear weapons, or even weapon launchers, there. And we do. Our possession is legal now, on a technicality, but it won't be when we enter Federation space."

"Can you not dismantle your armament?"

"That'd take weeks. It's been integrated with the ship. And—what difference? I tell you, your

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appearance on Earth might cost us the war. And *that* would set Alerion up to prepare the next aggression." Heim thought of Madelon. "Or so I believe. Could be wrong, I suppose."

"No, you are right," Irribarne said dully.

"It might be the only way out. Surrender."

"There must be another! I will not be so fanatic that women and children surely die. But a risk of death, against the chance to keep our homes, yes, that is something we all accepted when we went into the *maquis.*"

Heim sat down, knocked out his pipe, and turned it over and over in his hands while he stared at the model of his first command. Inexplicably his emotions began to shift. He felt less heavy, there was a stirring in him, he groped through blackness toward some vague, strengthening glimmer.

"Look," he said, "let's try to reason this through. *Fox* is keeping the war alive by refusing to quit. As long as we're out here fighting, the people at home who think like us can argue that Alerion is being whittled down at no cost to the taxpayer. And, *ja,* they can beat the propaganda drums, make big fat heroes of us, stir the old tribal emotions. They haven't the political pull to make the Authority order the Navy to move; but they have enough to keep us from being recalled. I deduce this from the simple facts that the Navy has not moved and we have not been recalled.

"Obviously that's an unstable situation. It's only kept going this long, I'm sure, because France tied Parliament in legal knots as to whether or not there really was a war on. The deadlock will be resolved one way or another pretty soon. We want to tilt the balance our way.

"Okay, one approach is for you people to let it be known you are alive—let it be known beyond any possible doubt—and also make it plain you are not going to surrender. You'll die before you give in. The way to do that is . . . let me think, let me think . . . yes. We've got *Meroeth.* With some repairs, she can make the passage; or else we can make another capture. We stay here, though, ourselves. What we send is—not a handful of men—a hundred women and children." Heim's palm cracked against his knee. "There's an emotional appeal for you!"

Irribarne's eyes widened until they were rimmed with white. "*Comment?* You are crazy? You cannot land on Europe Neuve."

"The space defenses aren't ready yet."

"But . . . no, they do have some detector satellites, and warcraft in orbit, and—"

"Oh, it's chancy," Heim agreed. He had no real sense of that. Ev-

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ery doubt was smothered in upsurging excitement. "We'll leave *Fox* in space, with most of your men aboard. If we fail, she can snatch another prize and send your men back in that. But I think I have a way to get *Meroeth* down, and up again, and stay in touch meanwhile. We'll need some computer work to make sure, but I think it might pan out. If not, well, you can show me how to be a guerrilla."

"Ah." Irribarne drew deeply on his cigar. "May I ask if this idea would seem so attractive, did it not offer a way to see Madelon?"

Heim gaped at him.

"Pardon," Irribarne blurted. "That was not badly meant. Old friendship, as you said. I like a loyal man." He extended his hand.

Heim took it and rose. "Come on," he said rather wildly. "We can't do anything till tomorrow. Let's get back to the party."

III

Elsewhere *Fox* plunged dark, every engine stilled, nothing but the minimum of life support equipment in operation, toward the far side of the moon Diane. It was not garrisoned, and a diameter of 1275 kilometers makes a broad shield. Even so, the tender that went from her carried brave men. They might have been spotted by some prowling Aleriona warcraft, especially in the moments when they crammed on deceleration to make a landing. Once down on that rough, airless surface, they moved their boat into an extinct fumarole for concealment, donned space gear, and struck out afoot. Their trip around to the planet-facing hemisphere was a miniature epic; let it only be said that they completed their errand and got back. Rendezvous with the ship was much too risky to attempt. They settled in the boat and waited.

Not long after, a giant meteorite or dwarf asteroid struck New Europe, burning a hole across the night sky and crashing in the Ocean du Destin a few hundred kilometers east of the Garance coast. Atmospherics howled in every Aleriona detector.

They faded; alerted flyers returned to berth; the night stillness resumed.

For all but the men aboard *Meroeth*.

When the fifty thousand tons to which she was grappled hit the outermost fringes of air, she let go and dropped behind. But she could not retreat far. Too many kilometers per second of velocity must be shed in too few kilometers of distance, before ablation devoured her. That meant a burst of drive forces, a blast of energies from a powerplant strained to its ultimate. The enemy's orbital detection system was still inade-

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quate; but it existed in part, and there were also instruments on the ground. Nothing could hide this advent—except the running, growing storm in the immediate neighborhood of a meteorite.

Radar would not pierce the ions which roiled at the stone's face and streamed back aft. Optical and infrared pickups were blinded. Neutrino or gravitronic detectors aimed and tuned with precision might have registered something which was not of local origin. But who would look for a ship in the midst of so much fury? Air impact alone, at that speed, would break her hull into a thousand flinders, which friction would then turn into shooting stars.

Unless she followed exactly behind the meteorite, using its mass for a bumper and heat shield, its flaming tail for a cloak.

No autopilot was ever built for that task. Gunnar Heim must do it. If he veered from his narrow slot of partial vacuum, he would die too quickly to know he was dead. For gauge he had only the incandescence outside, instrument readings, and whatever intuition was bestowed by experience. For guide he had a computation of where he ought to be, at what velocity, at every given moment, unreeling on tape before his eyes. He merged himself with the ship, his hands made a blur on the console, he did not notice the waves of heat, the buffetings and bellowings of turbulence, save as a thunderstorm deep in his body.

His cosmos shrank to a firestreak, his reason for being to the need of holding this clumsy mass nose-on to the descent pattern. He became a robot, executing orders written for it by whirling electrons.

No: he was more. The feedback of data through senses, judgment, will, made the whole operation possible. But none of that took place on a conscious level. There wasn't time!

That was as well. Live flesh could not have met those demands for more than a few seconds. The meteorite, slowed only a little by the air wall through which it plunged, outraced the spaceship and hit the sea—still with such force that water had no chance to splash but actually shattered. *Meroeth* was as yet several kilometers aloft, her own speed reduced to something that metal could tolerate. The pattern tape said CUT and Heim slammed down a switch. The engine roar whirred into silence.

He checked his instruments. "All's well," he said. His voice sounded strange in his ears, only slowly did he come back to himself, as if he had run away from his soul and it must now catch up. "We're under the Bonne Chance horizon, headed southwest on just about the trajectory we were trying for."

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"Whoo-oo-oo," said Vadasz in a weak tone. His hair was plastered lank to the thin high-cheeked face, his garments drenched.

"Bridge to engine room," Heim said. "Report."

"All in order, sir," came the voice of Diego Gonzales. "Shall I turn on the coolers?"

"Well, do you like this furnace?" grumbled Jean Irribarne. Heat radiated from every bulkhead.

"Go on," Heim decided. "If anyone's close enough to detect the anomaly, we've had it anyway." He kept eyes on the console before him, but jerked a thumb at Vadasz. "Radar registering?"

"No," said the Hungarian. "We appear to be quite private."

Those were the only men aboard. No more were needed for a successful landing; and in case of failure, Heim did not want to lose lives essential to *Fox*. Gonzales was a good third engineer; Vadasz had been a fairly competent steward, and as a minstrel had a lot to do with keeping morale high. Still, the ship could manage without them. One colonist sufficed to guide *Meroeth*, and Irribarne had pulled rank to win that dangerous honor. The rest must bring their story to Earth, should the present scheme miscarry. As for Heim himself—First Officer David Penoyer had protested and been overruled. Penoyer could serve quite well as captain. He had never understood, though, why Heim insisted on going down.

Madelon—

No, no, ridiculous. Maybe it's true that you never really fall out of love with anyone; but new loves do come, and while his wife lived he had rarely thought about New Europe. For that matter, his reunion with Jocelyn Lawrie had driven most else out of his mind. For a while.

No doubt he'd only been so keyed up about Madelon because of . . . he wasn't sure what. A silly scramble after his lost youth, probably. She was middle-aged now, placidly married, according to her brother-in-law she had put on weight. He wanted to see her again, of course, but he need only instruct *Meroeth*'s pilot to make sure she was among the evacuees.

No. That won't do. Too many unforeseen things could happen. I've got to be in the nucleus, personally.

A new sound filled the hull, the keening of sundered air, deepening toward a hollow boom, as the ship dropped below sonic speed. Heim looked out the forward viewport. The ocean reached vast beneath, phosphor-tinged waves and a shadow at the horizon that must be one of the Iles des Reves. He applied the least bit of thrust to keep in a stable glide.

This was not the ideal approach to Haute Garance. But

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while meteorites are plentiful, his had had too many requirements to meet. It must be large, yet not too large to nudge into the right orbit in a reasonable time; the point at which *Fox* grappled and towed must be fairly near the planet but not dangerously near; the path after release must look natural; it must terminate in an uninhabited region, at night. You couldn't scout the Auroran System forever, only until a halfway acceptable chunk of rock was found. Meanwhile *Meroeth* could be reconverted: lights, temperature, air systems adjusted for human comfort, the interior stripped of plants and less understandable Aleriona symbols, the controls ripped out and a Terrestrial version installed. The bridge had a plundered look. Heim thought, briefly and irrationally, how this —far more than any attack— would have struck his old antagonist Cynbe with horror and wrath.

Onward the ship fell, slower and lower until the sea appeared to rise and lick at her. Vadasz probed the sky with his instruments, awkwardly—he had gotten hasty training—and intently. His lips were half parted, as if to cry, "Fire!" to Irribarne in the single manned gun turret. But he found only night, unhurried winds and strange constellations.

It would not have been possible to travel thus far, undetected, across a civilization. But New Europe has 72 percent of Earth's surface area; it is an entire world. Coeur d'Yvonne had been almost the only outpost on any other continent than Pays d'Espoir, and that city was annihilated. The Aleriona occupied Garance, where the mines and machines were: a mere fringe on hugeness. Otherwise they must rely on scattered detector stations, roving flyers, and the still incomplete satellite system. His arrival being unknown to them, the odds favored Heim.

Nonetheless . . . careful, careful.

He started the engines again. At low power, *Meroeth* lumbered across the Golfe des Dragons. Diane hove into view, nearly full. The moon was smaller than Luna seen from Earth—22 minutes angular diameter—and less bright, but still a blue-marked tawny cornucopia that scattered metal shards across the water.

Then the mainland rose, hills and woods climbing swiftly toward snowpeaks. Irribarne left his gun and got on the radio in a harsh clatter of Basque. It wouldn't do to have the French shoot when they saw the great Aleriona craft. Or, more likely, run and hide. The wilderness concealed an entire headquarters base.

The land beneath grew ever more rugged. Rivers ran from the snows, leaped down cliffs, foamed

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into steep valleys and were lost to sight among the groves. A bird flock rose in alarm when the ship passed over, there must be a million pairs of wings, blotting out half the sky. Vadasz whistled in awe. *"Isten irgalmazzon!* I wondered how long the people could stay hidden, even alive, in the bush. But three times their number could do it."

"Yeh," Heim grunted. "Except for one thing."

Lac aux Nuages appeared, a wide wan sheet among darkling trees, remotely encircled by mountains whose glaciers gleamed beneath the moon. Irribarne relayed instructions. Heim found the indicated spot, just off the north shore, and lowered ship. The concealing waters closed over him. He heard girders groan a little, felt an indescribable soft resistance go through the frame to himself, eased off power and let the hull settle in ooze. When he cut the interior gee-field, he discovered the deck was canted.

His heart thuttered, but he could only find flat words: "Let's get ashore." Even in seven-tenths of Terrestrial gravity, it was a somewhat comical effort to reach the emergency escape lock without falling. When the four men were crowded inside, clothes bundled on their necks, he dogged the inner door and cranked open the outer one. Water poured icily through. He kicked to the surface and swam as fast as possible toward land. Moonlight glimmered on the guns of the men who stood there waiting for him.

IV

The tent was big. The trees that surrounded it were taller yet. At the top of red-brown trunks, they fountained in branches whose leaves overarched and hid the pavilion under cool sun-flecked shadows. Their foliage was that greenish gold hue the native "grasses" shared, to give the Garance country its name. Wind rustled them. Through the open flap, Heim could look down archways of forest to the lake. It glittered unrestfully, outward past the edge of vision. Except for some wooded islands, the only land seen in that direction was the white-crowned sierra. Blue with distance, the peaks jagged into a deep blue sky.

Aurore was not long up. The eastern mountains were still in a dusk, the western ones still faintly flushed. They would remain so for a while; New Europe takes more than 75 hours to complete a rotation. The sun did not look much different from Earth's, about the same apparent size, a little less brilliant, its color more orange than yellow. Heim had found Vadasz in the dews at dawn, watching the light play in the mists that streamed over the lake, altogether speechless.

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That time was ended. Colonel Robert de Vigny, once constabulary commandant, now beret-crowned king of the *maquis*, bridged his fingers, leaned stiffly across his desk, and said, "So. You have made the situation clear, and we seem to have threshed out a plan of action. Let me review what was decided."

Heim could just follow the swift, crisp French: "Your privateer has found a way to lie undetected in this vicinity, and you can summon her by that most admirable means you have invented. We have the big transport *Meroeth*. We will put some two hundred women and children aboard her, with supplies, to bring Earth a direct appeal that Earth may find hard to resist. They can flit in by ones and twos during the next few days, while my men run an underwater loading tube to an airlock.

"Meanwhile, we in the forest must live. So I will establish radio contact with the Aleriona and ask for a parley. They will doubtless agree, especially since their new chief of naval operations seems to be a rather decent fellow. I daresay they will receive our representatives already tomorrow.

"We shall try to reach an agreement that will leave us free. Cessation of guerrilla raids in exchange for vitamins—yes, they should think that is to their advantage, for they will count on dealing with us after the space fortifications are complete. You, Captain Heim, with your professional eye, and Monsieur Vadasz, with your poet's grasp of nonhuman psychology, will be with our delegation in the guise of ordinary colonists. Perhaps you can gather some useful intelligence.

"Whatever the result, our representatives will return here.

"Then you summon *Fox*. She makes a covering raid while *Meroeth* gets aloft, and convoys her to the necessary distance from Aurore where her Mach engines can start her off faster than light.

"After that, if we are provided with the capsules, you continue your warfare in space. If we are not, and if *Fox* cannot help us steal them by providing air cover, I will call the enemy again and offer him an end to your privateering on condition he supply us. This he is virtually sure to accept. So . . . at large cost or small, we will have gained time, during which we hope Earth will come to help. Have I stated matters correctly?"

Heim nodded and got out his pipe. De Vigny's nostrils dilated. "Tobacco?" the New European breathed. "One had almost forgotten."

Heim chuckled and threw the pouch onto the desk. De Vigny picked up a bell and rang it. An aide-de-camp materialized in the tent entrance, saluting. "Find me

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a pipe," de Vigny said. "And, if the captain does not object, you may find one for yourself too."

"At once, my colonel!" The aide dematerialized.

"Well." De Vigny unbent a trifle. "Thanks are a poor thing, Monsieur. What can New Europe *do* for you?"

Heim grew conscious of Vadasz's half jocose, half sympathetic regard, blushed, and said roughly, "I have an old friend on this planet, who's now Jean Irribarne's sister-in-law. See to it that she and her family are among the evacuees."

"Pierre will not go when other men stay," the Basque said gently.

"But they shall most certainly come here if you wish," de Vigny said. He rang for another aide. "Lieutenant Irribarne, why do you not go with Major Legrand to my own flyer? It has a set which can call to anywhere in the Haute Garance. If you will tell the operator where they are, your kin—" When that was done, he said to Heim and Vadasz, "I shall be most busy today, it is plain. But let us relax until after lunch. We have many stories to trade."

And so they did.

When at last de Vigny must dismiss them, Heim and Vadasz were somewhat at loose ends. There was little to see. Though quite a few men were camped around the lake, the shelters were scattered and hidden, the activity unobtrusive. Now and then a flyer came by, as often as not weaving between tree trunks under the concealing foliage. Small radars sat in camouflage, watching for the unlikely appearance of an Aleriona vessel. The engineers could not install their tube to the ship before night, unless one of the frequent fogs rose to cover their work. Men sat about yarning, gambling, doing minor chores. All were eager to talk with the Earthlings, but the Earthlings soon wearied of repeating themselves. Toward noon, a degree of physical tiredness set in as well. They had been up for a good eighteen hours.

Vadasz yawned. "Let us go back to our tent," he suggested. "This planet has such an inconvenient rotation. You must sleep away a third of the daylight and be awake two-thirds of the night. But at the tent I have a flask of brandy, and—"

They were not far from it then, were crossing a meadow where flame-colored blossoms nodded in the golden grass. Jean Irribarne stepped from under the trees. "Ah, he hailed, *"vous voila.* I have looked for you."

"What about?" Heim asked.

The lieutenant beamed. "Your friends are here." He turned and called, "'Allo-o-o!"

They came out into the open, six of them. The blood left Heim's heart and flooded back. He stood

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in a sunlit darkness that whirled.

She approached him timidly. Camp clothes, faded and shapeless, had today been exchanged for a dress brought along to the woods and somehow preserved. It fluttered light and white around her long-legged slenderness. Aurore had bleached the primly braided brown hair until it was paler than her skin; but still it shone, and one lock blew free above the heartshaped face.

"Madelon," he croaked.

"Gunnar." The handsome plumpish woman took both his hands. *"C'est si bon te voir encore. Bienvenu."*

"A nej—" The breath rasped into him. He pulled back his shoulders. "I was surprised," he said limpingly. "Your daughter looks so much like you."

"Pardon?" The woman struggled with long unused English.

Her husband, an older and heavier version of Jean, interpreted while he shook Heim's hand. Madelon laughed. *"Oui, oui, tout le monde le dit. Quand j'etais jeune, peutetre. Danielle, je voudrais que tu fasses la connaissance de mon vieil ami Gunnar Heim."*

"Je suis tres honoree, Monsieur." She could scarcely be heard above the wind as it tossed the leaves and made light and shadow dance behind her. The fingers were small and cool in Heim's, quickly withdrawn.

In some vague fashion he met teen-age Jacques, Cecile, and Yves. Madelon talked a lot, without much but friendly banalities coming through the translations of the Irribarne brothers. All the while Danielle stood quiet. But at parting, with promises of a real get-together after sleep, she smiled at him.

Heim and Vadasz watched them leave, before going on themselves. When the forest had closed upon her, the minstrel whistled. "Is that indeed the image of your one-time sweetheart, yonder girl?" he asked.

"More or less," Heim said, hardly aware that he talked to anyone else. "There must be differences, I suppose. Memory plays tricks."

"Still, one can see what you meant by—Forgive me, Gunnar but may I advise that you be careful? There are so many years to stumble across."

"Good Lord!" Heim exploded angrily. "What do you take me for? I was startled, nothing else."

"Well, if you are certain. . . . You see, I would not wish to—"

"Shut up. Let's find that brandy." Heim led the way with tremendous strides.

V

Day crept toward evening. But life kept its own pace, which can be a fast one in time of war. At sunset Heim found himself on a

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ness jutting into the lake, alone with Danielle.

He was not sure how. There had been the reunion and a meal as festive as could be managed, in the lean-to erected near the Irribarne flyer. Champagne, which he had taken care to stow aboard *Meroeth*, flowed freely. Stiffness dissolved in it. Presently they sprawled on the grass, Vadasz's guitar rang and most voices joined his. But Heim and Madelon kept somewhat apart, struggling to talk, and her oldest daughter sat quietly by.

They could not speak much of what had once been. Heim did not regret that, and doubted Madelon did. Meeting again like this, they saw how widely their ways had parted; now only a look, a smile, a bit of laughter could cross the distance between. She was an utterly good person, he thought, but she was not Connie or even Jocelyn. And, for that matter, he was not Pierre.

So they contented themselves with trading years. Hers had been mild until the Aleriona came. Pierre, the engineer, built dikes and power stations while she built their lives. Thus Heim found himself relating the most. It came natural to make the story colorful.

His eyes kept drifting toward Danielle.

Finally—this was where the real confusion began as to what had happened—the party showed signs of breaking up. He wasn't sleepy himself, though the wine bubbled in his head, and his body demanded exercise. He said something about taking a stroll. Had he invited the girl along, or had she asked to come, or had Madelon chuckling low in the way he remembered, sent them off together with a remark about his needing a guide? Everybody had spoken, but between his bad French and hammering pulse he wasn't sure who had said what. He did recall that the mother had given them a little push toward the deeper forest, one hand to each.

Song followed them a while (*"Auprés de ma blonde, qu'il fait bon, fait bon, fait bon—"*) but by the time they reached the lakeshore they heard simply a lap-lap of wavelets, rustle of leaves, flute of a bird. Aurore was going down behind the western peaks, which stood black against a cloud bank all fire and gold. The same long light made a molten bridge on the water, from the sun toward him and her. But eastward fog was rolling, slow as the sunset, a topaz wall that at the top broke into banners of dandelion yellow in a sky still clear with day. The breeze cooled his skin.

He saw her clasp arms together. *"Avez vous froid, Mademoiselle?"* he asked, much afraid they would have to go back. She smiled even before he took off his cloak, prob-

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ably at what he was doing to her language. He threw it over her shoulders. When his hands brushed along her neck, he felt his sinews go taut and withdrew in a hurry.

"Thank you." She had a voice too light for English or Norwegian, which turned French into song. "But will you not be cold?"

"No. I am fine." (Damn! Did *fin* have the meaning he wanted?) "I am—" He scratched around for words. "Too old and hairy to feel the weather."

"You are not old, Monsieur Captain," she said gravely.

"Ha!" He crammed fists into pockets. "What age have you? Nineteen? I have a daughter that which she—I have a daughter a few years less."

"Well—" She laid a finger along her jaw. He thought wildly what a delicate line that bone made, over the small chin to a gentle mouth; and, yes, her nose tipped gaily upward, with some freckless dusted across the bridge. "I know you are my mother's age. But you do not look it, and what you have done is more than any young man could."

"Thanks. Thanks. Nothing."

"Mother was so excited when she heard," Danielle said. "I think Father got a little jealous. But now he likes you."

"Your father is a good man." It was infuriating to be confined to this first-grade vocabulary.

"May I ask you something, Monsieur?"

"Ask me anybody." The one rebellious lock of hair had gotten free again.

"I have heard that we who go to Earth do so to appeal for help. Do you really think we will matter that much?"

"Well, uh, well, we had a necessity to come here. That is to say, we have now made established communication from your people to mine in space. So we can also take people like you away."

A crease of puzzlement flitted between her brows. "But they have spoken of how difficult it was to get so big a ship down without being seen. Could you not better have taken a little one?"

"You are very clever, Mademoiselle, but—" Before he could construct a cover-up, she touched his arm (how lightly!) and said:

"You came as you did, risking your life, for Mother's sake. Is that not so?"

"Uh, uh, well, naturally I thought over her. We are old friends."

She smiled. "Old sweethearts, I have heard. Not all the knights are dead, Captain. I sat with you today, instead of joining in the music, because you were so beautiful to watch."

His heart sprang until he realized she had been using the second person plural. He hoped the

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sunset light covered the hue his face must have. "Mademoiselle," he said, "your mother and I are friends. Only friends."

"Oh, but of course. I understand. Still, it was so good of you, everything you have done for us." The evening star kindled above her head. "And now you will take us to Earth. I have dreamed about such a trip since I was a baby."

There was an obvious opening to say that she was more likely to make Earth sit up and beg than vice versa, but he could only hulk over her, trying to find a graceful way of putting it. She sighed and looked past him.

"Your men too, they are knights," she said. "They have not even your reason to fight for New Europe. Except perhaps Monsieur Vadasz?"

"No, Endre has no one here," Heim said. "He is a troubadour."

"He sings so wonderfully," Danielle murmured. "I was listening all the time. He is a Hungarian?"

"By birth. Now he has no home." *Endre, you're a right buck, but this is getting to be too much about you.* "I have—have—When you to arrive on Earth, you and your family use my home. I come when I can and take you in my ship."

She clapped her hands. "Oh, wonderful!" she caroled. "Your daughter and I, we shall become such good friends. And afterward, a voyage on a warship— What songs of victory we will sing, homeward bound!"

"Well—um— We return to camp now? Soon is dark." Under the circumstances, one had better be as elaborately gentlemanly as possible.

Danielle drew the cloak tight around her. "Yes, if you wish." He wasn't sure whether that showed reluctance or not. But as she started walking immediately, he made no comment, and they spoke little en route.

The party was indeed tapering off. Heim's and Danielle's return touched off a round of goodnights. When she gave him back his cloak, he dared squeeze her hand. Vadasz kissed it, with a flourish.

On their way back through leafy blue twilight, the minstrel said, "Ah, you are the lucky one still."

"What do you mean?" Heim snapped.

"Taking the fair maiden off that way. What else?"

"For God's sake!" Heim growled. "We just wanted to stretch our legs. I don't have to rob cradles yet."

"Are you quite honest, Gunnar?— No, wait, please don't tie me in a knot. At least, not in a granny knot. It is only that Mlle. Irribarne is attractive. Do you mind if I see her?"

"What the blaze have I got to say about that?" Heim retorted

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out of his anger. "But listen, she's the daughter of a friend of mine, and these colonial French have a medieval notion of what's proper. Follow me?"

"Indeed. No more need be said." Vadasz whistled merrily the rest of the way. Once in his sleeping bag, he drowsed off at once. Heim had a good deal more trouble doing so.

Perhaps for that reason, he woke late and found himself alone in the tent. Probably Diego was helping de Vigny's sappers and Endre had wandered off—wherever. It was not practical for guerrillas to keep a regular mess, and the campstove, under a single dim light, showed that breakfast had been prepared. Heim fixed his own, coffee, wildfowl, and a defrosted chunk of the old and truly French bread which is not for tender gums. Afterward he washed, depilated the stubble on his face, shrugged into some clothes and went outside.

No word for me, evidently. If any comes, it'll keep. I feel restless. How about a swim? He grabbed a towel and started off.

Diane was up. Such light as came through the leaves made the forest a shifting bewilderment of black and white, where his flashbeam bobbed lonely. The air had warmed and cleared. He heard summery noises, whistles, chirps, croaks, flutters, none of them quite like home. When he emerged on the shore, the lake was a somehow bright sable, each little wave tipped with moonfire. The snowpeaks stood hoar beneath a universe of stars. He remembered the time on Staurn when he had tried to pick out Achernar; tonight he could do so with surety, for it burned great in this sky. His triumph, just about when Danielle was being born—*"Vous n'etes pas vieux, Monsieur le Capitaine."*

He stripped, left the beam on to mark the spot, and waded out. The water was cold, but he needed less willpower than usual to take the plunge when it was waist deep. For a time he threshed about, warming himself, then struck out with long quiet strokes. Moonlight rippled in his wake. The fluid slid over his skin like a girl's fingers.

Things are looking up, he thought with a growing gladness. *We really do have a good chance to rescue this planet. And if part of the price is that I stop raiding —why, I'll be on Earth too.*

Did it sing within him, or had a bird called from the nest ahead?

No. Birds don't chord on twelve strings. Heim grinned and swam forward as softly as he was able. Endre's adrenal glands would benefit from a clammy hand laid on him from behind and a shouted "Boo!"

The song grew stronger.

"Roslein, Roslein, Roslein rot, Roslein auf der Heiden."

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As it ended, Heim saw Vadasz seated on a log, silhouetted against the sky. He was not alone.

Her voice came clear through the night. *"Oh, c'est beau. Je n'aurais jamais cru que les allemands pouvaient avoir une telle sensibilite."*

Vadasz laughed. *"Vous savez, Goethe vecut il y a long-temps. Mais pourqúoi rappepler de vieilles haines pendant une si belle nuit? Nous sommes ici pour admirer, parler, et chanter, n'est-ce pas?"*

Briefly, blindingly, Heim remembered himself with Jocelyn Lawrie, that time not long ago when they met again after years—and she told him that for her those had been years wasted—and her tone was like Danielle's now—

"Chantez encore, je vous en prie."

The strings rang very softly, made themselves a part of night and woods and water. Vadasz's words twined among them. Danielle sighed and leaned a bit closer.

Heim swam away.

No, he told himself, and once more: *No. Endre isn't being a bastard. He asked me.*

The grip on his throat did not loosen. He ended his quietness and churned the water with steamboat violence. *He's young. I could have been her father. But I junked the chance.*

No. I'm being ridiculous. I had you, Connie, while you lived.

Ved Gud— His brain went in rage to the tongue of his childhood. *By God, if he does anything —! I'm not too old to break a man's neck.*

What the hell business is it of mine? I've got Jocelyn!. .

He stormed ashore and abraded himself dry. Clothes on, he stumbled through the woods. There was a bottle in the tent, not quite empty.

A man waited for him. He recnized one of de Vigny's aides. "Well?"

The officer sketched a salute. "I 'ave a message for you, Monsieur. The colonel 'as contact the enemy. They receive a delegation in Bonne Chance after day 'as break."

"Okay. Goodnight."

"But, Monsieur—"

"I know. We have to confer. Well, I'll come when I can. We've plenty of time. It's going to be a long night." Heim brushed past the aide and closed his tent flap.

VI

Below, the Carsac Valley rolled broad and rich. Farmsteads could be seen, villages, an occasional factory surrounded by gardens—but nowhere man, the land was empty; livestock run wild, weeds reclaiming the fields. Among them flowed the river, metal bright in the early sun.

When he looked out the view-

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ports of the flyer where he sat, Heim saw his escort, four Aleriona military vehicles. The intricate, gaily colored patterns painted on them did not soften their barracuda outlines. Guns held aim on the unarmed New European. *We could change from delegates to prisoners in half a second,* he thought, and reached for his pipe.

"Pardon." Lieutenant Colonel Charles Navarre, head of the eight-man negotiation team, tapped his shoulder. "Best lock that away, Monsieur. We have not had tobacco in the *maquis* for one long time."

"Damn! You're right. Sorry." Heim got up and stuck his smoking materials in a locker.

"They are no fools, them." Navarre regarded the big man carefully. "Soon we land. Is anything else wrong with you, Captain Alphonse Lafayette?"

"No, I'm sure not," Heim said in English. "But let's go down the list. My uniform's obviously thrown together, but that's natural for a guerrilla. I don't look like a typical colonist, but they probably won't notice, and if they do it won't surprise them."

"Comment?" asked another officer.

"Didn't you know?" Heim said. "Aleriona are bred into standardized types. From their viewpoint, humans are so wildly variable that a difference in size and coloring is trivial. Nor have they got enough familiarity with French to detect my accent, as long as I keep my mouth shut most of the time. Which'll be easy enough, since I'm only coming along in the hope of picking up a little naval intelligence."

"Yes, yes," Navarre said impatiently. "But be most careful about it." He leaned toward Vadasz, who had a seat in the rear. "You too, Lieutenant Gaston Girard."

"On the contrary," the minstrel said, "I have to burble and chatter and perhaps irritate them somewhat. There is no other way to probe the mood of nonhumans. But have no fear. This was all thought about. I am only a junior officer, not worth much caution on their part." He smiled tentatively at Heim. "You can vouch for how good I am at being worthless, no, Gunnar?"

Heim grunted. Pain and puzzlement flickered across the Magyar's features. When first his friend turned cold to him, he had put it down to a passing bad mood. Now, as Heim's distantness persisted, there was no chance—in this crowded, thrumming cabin—to ask what had gone wrong.

The captain could almost read those thoughts. He gusted out a breath and returned to his own seat forward. *I'm being stupid and petty and a son of a bitch in general,* he knew. *But I can't forget Danielle, this sunrise with the fog drops like jewels in her hair,*

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and the look she gave him when we said goodbye. Wasn't I the one who'd earned it?

He was quite glad when the flyer started down.

Through magnification before it dropped under the horizon, he saw that Bonne Chance had grown some in twenty years. But it was still a small city, nestled on the land's seaward shoulder: a city of soft-hued stucco walls and red tile roofs, of narrow ambling streets, suspension bridges across the Carsac, a market square where the cathedral fronted on outdoor stalls and outdoor cafes, docks crowded with watercraft, and everywhere trees, Earth's green chestnut and poplar mingled with golden bellefleur and gracis. The bay danced and dazzled, the countryside rolled ablaze with wildflowers, enclosing the town exactly as they had done when he wandered hand in hand with Madelon.

Only . . . the ways were choked with dead leaves; houses stared blank and blind; boats moldered in the harbor; machines rusted silent; the belfry rooks were dead or fled and a fauquette cruised the sky on lean wings, searching for prey. The last human thing that stirred was the aerospace port, twenty kilometers inland.

And those were not men or men's devices bustling over its concrete. The airships bringing cargo had been designed by no Terrestrial engineer. The factories they served were windowless prolate domes, eerily graceful for all that they were hastily assembled prefabs. Conveyors, trucks, lifts were manmade, but the controls had been rebuilt for hands of another shape and minds trained to another concept of number. Barracks surrounded the field, hundreds of buildings reaching over the hills; from above, they looked like open-petaled bronze flowers. Missiles stood tall among them, waiting to pounce. Auxiliary spacecraft clustered in the open. One was an armed pursuer, whose snout reached as high as the cathedral cross.

"It must belong to a capital ship in planetary orbit," Heim decided. "And if that's the only such, the other warships must be out on patrol."

"I do not see how you can use the information," Navarre said. "A single spacecraft of the line gives total air superiority when there is nothing against it but flyers. And our flyers are not even military."

"Still, it's helpful to see what you're up against. You're sure their whole power is concentrated here?"

"Yes, quite sure. This area has most of our industrial facilities. There are garrisons elsewhere, at certain mines and plants, as well as at observation posts. But our scouts have reported those are negligible in themselves."

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"So. . . . I'd guess, then, knowing how much crowding Aleriona will tolerate—let me think—I'd estimate their number at around 50,000. Surely the military doesn't amount to more than a fifth of that. They don't need more defense. Upper-type workers—what we'd call managers, engineers, and so forth—are capable of fighting but aren't trained for it. The lower-type majority have had combativeness bred out. So we've really only got 10,000 Aleriona to worry about. How many men could you field?"

"Easily a hundred thousand—who would be destroyed the moment they ventured out of the forests."

"I know. A rifle isn't much use when you face heavy ground and air weapons." Heim grimaced.

The flyer touched concrete at the designated point and halted. Its escort remained hovering. Navarre stood up. "*Sortons,*" he said curtly, and led the way out the door.

Twenty Aleriona of the warrior class waited in file. Their lean, forward-slanting, long-tailed forms were less graceful than those of the master breed; their fur lacked the silvery sparkle, the fair hair did not flow loose but was braided under the conical helmets, the almost-human faces were handsome rather than possessing the disturbing muliebrile beauty of an overlord. The long sunrays turned their scaly garments almost incandescent.

They did not draw the crooked swords at their belts nor point guns at the newcomers; they might have been statues. Their officer stepped forward, making the intricate gesture that signified respect. He was taller than his followers, though still below average human height.

"Well are you come," he sang in fairly good French. "Wish you rest or refreshment?"

"No, thank you," Navarre said, slowly so the alien could follow his dialect. Against the fluid motion that confronted him, his stiffness looked merely lumpy. "We are prepared to commence discussions at once."

"Yet first ought you be shown your quarters. Nigh to the high masters of the Garden of War is prepared a place as best we might." The officer trilled an order. Several low-class workers appeared. They did not conform at all to Earth's picture of Aleriona—their black-clad bodies were too heavy, features too coarse, hair too short, fur too dull, and there was nothing about them of that inborn unconscious arrogance which marked the leader types. Yet they were not servile, nor were they stupid. A million years of history, its only real change the glacial movement toward an ever more unified society, had fitted their very genes for this

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part. If the officer was a panther and his soldiers watchdogs, these were mettlesome horses.

In his role as aide, Vadasz showed them the party's baggage. They fetched it out, the officer whistled a note, the troopers fell in around the humans and started off across the field. There was no marching; but the bodies rippled together like parts of one organism. Aurore struck the contact lenses which protected them from its light and turned their eyes to rubies.

Heim's own eyes shifted back and forth as he walked. Not many other soldiers were in evidence. Some must be off duty, performing one of those enigmatic rites that were communion, conversation, sport, and prayer to an Aleriona below the fifth level of mastery. Others would be at the missile sites or on air patrol. Workers and supervisors swarmed about, unloading cargo, fetching metal from a smelter or circuit parts from a factory to another place where it would enter some orbital weapon. Their machines whirred, clanked, rumbled. Nonetheless, to a man the silence was terrifying. No shouts, no talk, no jokes or curses were heard: only an occasional melodic command, a thin weaving of taped orchestral music the *pad-pad* of a thousand soft feet.

Vadasz showed his teeth in a grin of sorts. *"Ils considerent la vie tres serieusement,"* he murmured to Navarre. *"Je parierais qu'ils ne font jamais de plaisanteries douteuses."*

Did the enemy officer cast him a look of—incomprehension? *"Taisez vousz"* Navarre said.

But Vadasz was probably right, Heim reflected. Humor springs from a certain inward distortion. To that great oneness which was the Aleriona soul, it seemed impossible: literally unthinkable.

Except . . . yes, the delegates to Earth, most especially Admiral Cynbe, had shown flashes of a bleak wit. But they belonged to the ultimate master class. It suggested a difference from the rest of their species which—He dismissed speculation and went back to observing as much detail as he could.

The walk ended at a building some hundred meters from the edge of the field. Its exterior was no different from the other multiple curved structures surrounding it. Inside, though, the rooms had clearly been stripped, the walls were raw plastic and floors stained where the soil of flowerbeds had been removed. Furniture, a bath cubicle, Terrestrial-type lights, plundered from houses, were arranged with a geometric precision which the Aleriona doubtless believed was pleasing to men. "Hither shall food and drink be brought you," the officer sang. "Have you wish to go elsewhere, those guards

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that stand outside will accompany."

"I see no communicator," Navarre said.

"None there is. With the wilderness dwellers make you no secret discourse. Within camp, your guards bear messages. Now must we open your holders-of-things and make search upon your persons."

Navarre reddened. "What? Monsieur, that violates every rule of parley."

"Here the rule is of the Great Society. Wish you not thus, yourselves you may backtake to the mountains." It was hard to tell whether or not that lilting voice held insult, but Heim didn't think so. The officer was stating a fact.

"Very well," Navarre spat. "We submit under protest, and this shall be held to your account when Earth has defeated you."

The Aleriona didn't bother to reply. Yet the frisking was oddly like a series of caresses.

No contraband was found, there not being any. Most of the colonists were surprised when the officer told them, "Wish you thus, go we this now to seek the Intellect Masters." Heim, recalling past encounters, was not. The Aleriona overlords had always been more flexible than their human counterparts. With so rigid a civilization at their beck, they could afford it.

"Ah . . . just who are they?" Navarre temporized.

"The *imbiac* of planetary and space defense are they, with below them the prime engineering operator. And then have they repositories of information and advice," the officer replied. "Is not for you a similarity?"

"I speak for the constabulary government of New Europe," Navarre said. "These gentlemen are my own experts, advisors, and assistants. But whatever I agree to must be ratified by my superiors."

Again the girlish face, incongruous on that animal body, showed a brief loosening that might betoken perplexity. "Come you?" the song wavered.

"Why not?" Navarre said. "Please gather your papers, Messieurs." His heels clacked on the way out.

Heim and Vadasz got to the door simultaneously. The minstrel bowed. "After you, my dear Alphonse," he said. The other man hesitated, unwilling. But no, you had to maintain morale. He bowed back: "After *you*, my dear Gaston." They kept it up for several seconds.

"Make you some ritual?" the officer asked.

"A most ancient one." Vadasz sauntered off side by side with him.

"Never knew I such grew in your race," the officer admitted.

"Well, now, let me tell you—" Vadasz started an energetic argument. *He's doing his job right*

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well, Heim conceded grudgingly.

Not wanting to keep the Magyar in his consciousness, he looked straight ahead at the building they were approaching. In contrast to the rest, it lifted in a single high curve, topped with a symbol resembling an Old Chinese ideogram. The walls were not blank bronze, but scored with microgrooves that turned them shiftingly, bewilderingly iridescent. He saw now that this was the source of the music, on a scale unimagined by men, that breathed across the port.

No sentries were visible. An Aleriona had nothing to fear from his underlings. The wall dilated to admit those who neared, and closed behind them.

There was no decompression chamber. The occupiers must find it easier to adapt themselves, perhaps with the help of drugs, to the heavy wet atmosphere of this planet. A hall sloped upward, dimly seen in the dull red light from a paraboloidal ceiling. The floor was carpeted with living, downy turf, the walls with phosphorescent vines and flowers that swayed, slowly keeping time to the music, and drenched the air with their odors. The humans drew closer together, as if for comfort. Ghost silent, ghost shadowy, they went with their guards to the council chamber.

It soared in a vault whose top was hidden by dusk, but where artificial stars glittered wintry keen. The interior was a vague, moving labyrinth of trellises, bushes, and bowers. Light came only from a fountain at the center, whose crimson-glowing waters leaped five meters out of a bowl carved like an open mouth, cascaded down again and filled every corner of the jungle with their clear splash and gurgle. Walking around it, Heim thought he heard wings rustle in the murk overhead.

The conqueror lords stood balanced on tails and clawed feet, waiting. There were half a dozen all told. None wore any special insignia of rank, but the light flickered lovingly over metal-mesh garments, lustrous hair and silver-sparked white fur. The angelic faces were in repose, the emerald eyes altogether steady.

To them the officer genuflected and the soldiers dipped their rifles. A few words were sung. The guards stepped back into darkness and the humans stood alone.

One Aleriona master arched his back and hissed. Almost instantly, his startlement passed. He trod forward so that his countenance came into plain view. Laughter belled from him, low and warm.

"Thus, Captain Gunnar Heim," he crooned in English. "Strangeness, how we must ever meet. Remember you not Cynbe ru Taren?"

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VII

So shattered was Heim's universe that he was only dimly aware of what happened. Through the red gloom, trillings went among the Aleriona. One bristled and cried an order to the guards. Cynbe countermanded it with an imperious gesture. Above the racket of his pulse, Heim heard the admiral murmur: "You would they destroy on this now, but such must not become. Truth, there can be no release; truth alike, you are war's honored prisoners." And there were more songs, and at last the humans were marched back to their quarters. But Heim remained.

Cynbe dismissed his fellow chieftains and all but four guards. By then the sweat was drying on the man's skin, his heartbeat slowed, the first total despair thrust down beneath an iron watchfulness. He folded his arms and waited.

The Aleriona lord prowled to the fountain, which silhouetted him as if against liquid flames. For a while he played with a blossoming vine. The sole noises were music, water, and unseen circling wings. It was long before he intoned, softly and not looking at the man:

"Hither fared I to have in charge the hunt for you the hunter. Glad was my hope that we might meet in space and love each the other with guns. Why came you to this dull soil?"

"Do you expect me to tell you?" Heim rasped.

"We are kinfolk, you and I. Sorrow, that I must wordbreak and keep you captive. Although your presence betokens this was never meant for a real parley."

"It was, however. I just happened to come along. You've no right to hold the New Europeans, at least."

"Let us not lawsplit. We two rear above such. Release I the others, home take they word to your warship. Then may she well strike. And we have only my cruiser *Jubalcho* to meet her. While she knows not what has happened to you her soul, *Fox II* abides. Thus gain I time to recall my deep-scattered strength."

The breath hissed between Heim's teeth. Cynbe swung about. His eyes probed like fire weapons. "What bethink you?"

"Nothing!" Heim barked frantically.

It raced within him: *He believes I took* Fox *down. Well, that's natural. Not knowing about our meteorite gimmick, he'd assume that only a very small or a very fast craft could sneak past his guard. And why should I come in a tender?* Fox *on the surface could do terrific damage, missile this base and strike at his flagship from a toadhole position.*

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I don't know what good it is having him misinformed but—play by ear, boy, play by ear. You haven't got anything left except your rusty old wits.

Cynbe studied him a while. "Not long dare I wait to act," he mused. "And far are my ships."

Heim forced a jeering note: "The practical limit of a maser beam is about twenty million kilometers. After that, if nothing else, the position error for a ship gets too big. And there's no way to lock onto an accelerating vessel till she's so close that you might as well use an ordinary 'caster. Her coordinates change too fast, with too many unpredictables like meteorite dodging. So how many units have you got on known orbits within twenty million kilometers?"

"Insult me not," Cynbe asked quietly. He stalked to the wall, brushed aside a curtain of flowers and punched the keys of an infotrieve. It chattered and extruded a printout. He brooded over the symbols. "*Inisant* the cruiser and *Savaidh* the lancer can we reach. All ignorant must the others wheel their way, until one by one they return on slow schedule and find only battle's ashes."

"What are the factors for those two?" Heim inquired. Mostly he was holding at bay the blood-colored stillness. It jarred him—not too much to jam the numbers into his memory—when Cynbe read off in English the orbital elements and present positions.

"Hence have I sent my race-brothers to summon them," the Aleronia went on. "At highest acceleration positive and negative, *Savaidh* takes orbit around Europe Neuve in eighteen hours, *Inisant* in twenty-three. I think not the Foxfolk will dread for you thus soon. With three warcraft aloft, this entire planet do we scan. Let your ship make the least of little moves, and destruction shall thunder upon her unstoppable. Although truth, when ready for smiting we shall send detector craft all places and seek her lair."

His tone had not been one of threat. It grew still milder: "This do I tell you in my thin hoping you yield her. Gallant was that ship, unfitting her death where the stars cannot see."

Heim pinched his lips together and shook his head.

"What may I offer you for surrender," Cynbe asked in sadness, "unless maychance you will take my love?"

"What the devil!" Heim exclaimed.

"We are so much alone, you and I," Cynbe sang. For the first time scorn touched his voice, as he jerked his tail in the direction of the warriors who stood, blank-faced and uncomprehending, half hidden in the twilight. "Think you I am kin to that?"

He glided closer. The illumina-

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tion played over shining locks and disconcertingly fair countenance. His great eyes lingered on the man. "Old is Alerion," he chanted, "old, old. Long-lived are the red dwarf stars, and late appears life in so feeble a radiance. Once we had come to being, our species, on a planet of seas vanished, rivers shrunk to trickles in desert, a word niggard of air, water, metal, life—uncountable ages lingered we in savagehood. Ah, slow was the machine with coming to us. What you did in centuries, we did in tens upon thousands of years; and when it was done, a million years a-fled, one society alone endured, swallowed every other, and the machine's might gave it upon us a grip not to be broken. Starward fared the Wanderers, vast-minded the Intellects, yet were but ripples over the still deep of a civilization eternity-rooted. Earth lives for goals, Alerion for changelessness. Understand you that, Gunnar Heim? Feel you how ultimate the winter you are?"

"I—you mean—" Cynbe's fingers stroked like a breath across the human's wrist. He felt the hair stir beneath them, and groped for a handhold in a world suddenly tilting. "Well, uh, it's been theorized. That is, some people believe you're just reacting because we threaten your stability. But it doesn't make sense. We could reach an accommodation, if all you want is to be let alone. You're trying to hound us out of space."

"Thus must we. Sense, reason, logic, are what save instruments of most ancient instinct? If races less powerful than we change, that makes nothing more than pullulation among insects. But you, you come in ten or twenty thousand years, one flick of time, come from the caves, bear weapons to shake planets as is borne a stone war-ax, you beswarm these stars and your dreams reach at the whole cosmos. *That* can we not endure! Instinct feels doom in this becoming one mere little enclave, given over helpless to the wild mercy of those who bestride the galaxy. Would you, could you trust a race grown strong that feeds on living brains? No more is Alerion able to trust a race without bounds to its hope. Back to your own planets must you be cast, maychance back to your caves or your dust."

Heim shook the soft touch loose, clenched his fists and growled: "You admit this, and still talk about being friends?"

Cynbe confronted him squarely, but sang with less than steadiness: "Until now said I 'we' for all Alerion. Sure is that not truth. For when first plain was your menace, plain too was that those bred stiff-minded, each for a one element of the Great Society, must go down before you who are not bound and fear not newness. Mine was the

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master type created that it might think and act as humans and so overmatch them." His hands smote together. "Lonely, lonely!"

Heim looked upon him in his beauty and desolation, and found no words.

Fiercely the Aleriona asked: "Guess you not how I must feel alone, I who think more Earthman than any save those few created like me? Know you not that glory there was to be on Earth, to lock with minds that had also no horizon, drown in your books and music and too much alive eye-arts? Barren are we, the Intellect Masters of the Garden of War; none may descend from us for troubling of Alerion's peace; yet were we given the forces of life, that our will and fury rear tall as yours, and when we meet, those forces bind us through rites they knew who stood at Thermopylae. But . . . when you seized me, Gunnar Heim, that once you ransomed your daughter with me . . . afterward saw I that too was a rite."

Heim took a backward step. Coldness ran down his spine and out into every nerve end.

Cynbe laughed. The sound was glorious to hear. "Let me not frighten you, *Star Fox* captain. I offer only that which you will take." Very gently: "Friendship? Talk? Together-faring? I ask you never betrayal of your people. Well might I order a wresting from you of your knowledge and plans, but never. Think you are a war captive, and no harm that you share an awareness with your captor, who would be your friend."

My God, it leaped in Heim. The sounds about him came through as if across a barrier of great distance or of fever. *Give me some time and . . . and I could use him.*

"Recall," Cynbe urged, "my might on Alerion stands high. Well can I someday make a wall for the race that bred you, and so spare them that which is extinction."

No! Sheer reflex. *I won't. I can't.*

Cynbe held out one hand. "Clasp this, as once you did," he begged. "Give me oath you will seek no escape nor warning to your breedmates. Then no guard shall there be for you; freely as myself shall you betread our camps and ships."

"No!" Heim roared aloud.

Cynbe recoiled. His teeth gleamed forth. "Little the honor you show to me," he whispered.

"I can't give you a parole," Heim said. *Whatever you do, don't turn him flat against you. There may be a chance here somewhere. Better dead, trying for a break, than*—Something flashed across his brain. It was gone before he knew what it was. His consciousness twisted about and went in a pursuit that made the

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sweat and heart-banging take over his body again.

Somehow, though every muscle was tight and the room had taken on an aspect of nightmare, he said dryly: "What'd be the use? I credit you with not being an idiot. You'd have an eye kept on me—now wouldn't you?"

Where a man might have been angered, Cynbe relaxed and chuckled. "Truth, at the least until *Fox II* be slain. Although afterward, when better we know each the other—"

Heim captured the thought that had run from him. Recognizing it was like a blow. He couldn't stop to weigh chances, they were probably altogether forlorn and he would probably get himself killed. *Let's try the thing out, at least. There's no commitment right away. If it's obviously not going to work, then I just won't make the attempt.*

He ran a dry tongue over dry lips, husked, and said, "I couldn't give you a parole anyway, at any time. You don't really think like a human, Cynbe, or you'd know why."

Membranes dimmed those eyes. The golden head drooped. "But always in your history was honor and admiration among enemies," the music protested.

"Oh, yes, that. Look, I'm glad to shake your hand." Oddly, it was no lie, and when the four slim fingers coiled around his Heim did not let go at once. "But I can't surrender to you, even verbally," he said. "I guess my own instincts won't let me."

"No, now, often have men—"

"I tell you, this isn't something that can be put in words. I can't really feel what you said, about humans being naturally horrible to Aleriona. No more can you feel what I'm getting at. But you did give me some rough idea. Maybe I could give you an idea of . . . well, what it's like to be a man whose people have lost their homes."

"I listen."

"But I'd have to show you. The symbols, the—You haven't any religion as humans understand it, you Aleronia, have you? That's one item among many. If I showed you some things you could see and touch, and tried to explain what they stand for, maybe— Well, how about it? Shall we take a run to Bonne Chance?"

Cynbe withdrew a step. Abruptly he had gone catlike.

Heim mocked him with a chopping gesture. "Oh, so you're scared I'll try some stunt? Bring guards, of course. Or don't bother, if you don't dare." He half turned. "I'd better get back to my own sort."

"You play on me," Cynbe cried.

"Nah. I say to hell with you, nothing else. The trouble is, you don't know what you've done on this planet. You aren't capable of knowing."

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"Arvan!" Heim wasn't sure how much was wrath in that explosion and how much was something else. "I take your challenge. Go we this now."

A wave of weakness passed through Heim. *Whew! So I did read his psychology right: Endre couldn't do better.* The added thought came with returning strength. "Good," he accepted shakily. "Because I am anxious for you to realize as much as possible. As you yourself said, you could be a powerful influence for helping Earth, if the war goes against us. Or if your side loses—that could happen, you know; our Navy's superior to yours, if only we can muster the guts to use it—in that case, I'd have some voice in what's to be done about Alerion. Let's take Vadasz along. You remember him, I'm sure."

"Ye-e-es. Him did I gaintell in your party, though scant seemed he to matter. Why wish you him?"

"He's better with words than I am. He could probably make it clearer to you." *He speaks German, and I do a little. Cynbe knows English, French, doubtless some Spanish—but German?*

The admiral shrugged and gave an order. One soldier saluted and went out ahead of the others, who accompanied the leaders—

—down the hall, into the morning, across the field to a military flyer. Cynbe stopped once, that he might slip contacts over eyeballs evolved beneath a red coal of a sun.

Vadasz waited with his guards. He looked small, hunched and defeated. "Gunnar," he said dully, "what's this?"

Heim explained. For a moment the Hungarian was puzzled. Then hope lit in his visage. "Whatever your idea is, Gunnar, I am with you," he said, and masked out expression.

Half a dozen troopers took places at the rear of the vehicle. Cynbe assumed the controls. "Put us down in the square," Heim suggseted, "and we'll stroll around."

"Strange are your ways," Cynbe cantillated. "We thought you were probed and understood, your weakness and shortsightenedness in our hands, but then *Fox II* departed. And now—"

"Your problem is, sir, that Aleriona of any given class, except no doubt your own, are stereotypes," Vadasz said. "Every human is a law to hinself."

Cynbe made no reply. The flyer took off.

It landed minutes later. The party debarked.

Silence dwelt under an enormous sky. Fallen leaves covered the pavement and overflowed a dry fountain. A storm had battered the market booths, toppled cafe tables and chairs, ripped the gay little umbrellas. Only the cathedral rose firm. Cynbe moved to-

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ward it. "No," Heim said, "let's make that the end of the tour."

He started in the direction of the river. Rubbish rustled from his boots, echoes flung emptily back from walls. "Can't you see what's wrong?" he asked. "Men lived here."

"Hence-driven are they," Cynbe answered. "Terrible to me Aleriona is an empty city. And yet, Gunnar Heim, was this a . . . a dayfly. Have you such rage that the less than a century is forsaken?"

"It was going to grow," Vadasz said.

Cynbe made an ugly face.

A small huddle of bones lay on the sidewalk. Heim pointed. "That was somebody's pet dog," he said. "It wondered where its gods had gone, and waited for them, and finally starved to death. Your doing."

"Flesh do you eat," Cynbe retorted.

A door creaked, swinging back and forth in the breeze off the water. Most of the house's furniture could still be seen inside, dusty and rain-beaten. Near the threshold sprawled the remnants of a rag doll. Heim felt tears bite his eyes.

Cynbe touched his hand. "Well remember I what are your children to you," he crooned.

Heim continued with long strides. "Humans live mostly for their children," Vadasz said.

The riparian esplanade came in sight. Beyond its rail, the Carsac ran wide and murmurous toward the bay. Sunlight flared off that surface, a trumpet call made visible.

Now! Heim thought. The blood roared in him. "One of our poets said what I mean," he spoke slowly. *"Wenn wir sind an der Fluss gekommen, und im Falls wir die Moglichkeit sehen, dann wereden wir ausspringen und nach dem Hafen Schwimmen."*

He dared not look to see how Vadasz reacted. Dimly he heard Cynbe ask, in a bemused way, "What token those words?"

With absolute coolness, Vadasz told him, "Man who is man does not surrender the hope of his loins unless manhood has died within."

Good lad! Heim cheered. But most of his consciousness crawled with the guns at his back.

They started west along the embankment. "Still apprehend I not," Cynbe sang. "Also Aleriona make their lives for those lives that are to come. What difference?"

Heim didn't believe he could hide his purpose much longer. So let it be this moment that he acted —the chance did not look too bad —let him at worst be shattered into darkness and the end of fear.

He stopped and leaned on the rail. "The difference," he said, "you can find in the same man's words. *Ich werde diesen Wesen*

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in das Wasser sturzen. Dann springen wir beide. It's, uh, it's hard to translate. But look down here."

Vadasz joined them. Glee quirked his lips, a tiny bit, but he declared gravely: "The poem comes from a saying of Heracleitus. 'No man bathes twice in the same river.' "

"That have I read." Cynbe shuddered. "Seldom was thus dreadful a thought."

"You see?" Heim laid a hand on his shoulder and urged him forward, until he also stood bent over the rail. His gaze was forced to the flowing surface, and held there as if hypnotized. "Here's a basic human symbol for you," Heim said. "A river, bound to the sea, bound to flood a whole countryside if you dam it. Motion, power, destiny, time itself."

"Had we known such on Alerion—" Cynbe whispered. "Our world raised naked rock."

Heim closed fingers on his neck. The man's free hand slapped down on the rail. A surge of arm and shoulder cast him and Cynbe across. They struck the current together.

VIII

His boots dragged him under. Letting the Aleriona go, he writhed about and clawed at the fastenings. The light changed from green to brown and then was gone. Water poured past, a cool and heavy force that tumbled him over and over. One off—two off—he struck upward with arms and legs. His lungs felt near bursting. Puff by grudged puff, he let out air. His mind began to wobble. *Here goes,* he thought, *a breath or a firebeam.* He stuck out as little of his face as he could, gasped, saw only the embankment, and went below again to swim.

Thrice more he did likewise, before he guessed he had come far enough to risk looking for Vadasz. He shook the wetness from hair and eyes and continued in an Australian crawl. Above the tinted concrete that enclosed the river, trees trapped sunlight in green and gold. A few roofpeaks showed, otherwise his ceiling was the sky, infinitely blue.

Before long Vadasz's head popped into sight. Heim waved at him and threshed on until he was under a bridge. It gave some protection from searchers. He grabbed a pier and trod water. The minstrel caught up and panted.

"*Karhoztatas,* Gunnar, you go as if the devil himself were after you!"

"Isn't he? Though it helps a lot that the Aleriona don't see so well here. Contacts stop down the brightness for them, but Aurore doesn't emit as much of the near infrared that they're most sensitive to as The Eith does." Heim found it calming to speak academ-

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ically. It changed him from a hunted animal to a military tactician. "Just the same, we'd better stay down as much as we can. And stay separate, too. You know the old Quai des Coquillages—it's still there? Okay, I'll meet you underneath it. If one of us waits an hour, let him assume the other bought a farm."

Since Vadasz looked more exhausted than himself, Heim started first. He didn't hurry, mostly he let the current bear him along, and reached the rivermouth in good shape: so good that the sheer wonder of his escape got to him. He spent his time beneath the dock simply admiring light-sparkles on water, the rake of masts, the fluid chill enclosing his skin, the roughness of the bollard he held, the chuckle against hulls and their many vivid colors. His mood had just begun to ravel away in worry (*Damn, I should've told Endre what I know*) when the Magyar arrived.

"Will they not seek us here first?" Vadasz asked.

"M-m, I doubt it," Heim said. "Don't forget, they're from a dry planet. The idea of using water for anything but drinking doesn't come natural to them; you notice they've left all these facilities untouched, though coastwise transport would be a handy supplement to their air freighters. Their first assumption ought to be that we went ashore as soon as we could and holed up in town. Still, we want to get out of here as fast as possible, so let's find a boat in working order."

"There you must choose. I am a landlubber by heritage."

"Well, I never got along with horses, so honors are even." Heim risked climbing onto the wharf for an overview. He picked a good-looking pleasure craft, a submersible hydrofoil, and trotted to her. Once below, she'd be undetectable by any equipment the Alerions had.

"Can we get inside?" the minstrel asked from the water.

"*Ja,* she's not locked. Yachtsmen trust each other." Heim unslipped the lines, pulled the canopy back, and extended an arm to help Vadasz up on deck. They tumbled into the cabin and closed the glasite. "Now, you check the radio while I have a look at the engine."

A year's neglect had not much hurt the vessel. In fact, the sun had charged her accumulators to maximum. Her bottom was foul, but that could be lived with. Excitement surged in Heim. "My original idea was to find a communicator somewhere in town, get word to camp, and then skulk about hoping we wouldn't be tracked down and wouldn't starve," he said. "But now—hell, we might get back in person! It'll at least be harder for the enemy to pick up our message and send a

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rover bomb after the source, if we're at sea. Let's go."

The motor chugged. The boat slid from land. Vadasz peered anxiously out the dome. "Why are they not after us in full cry?"

"I told you how come. They haven't yet guessed we'd try this way. Also, they must be disorganized as a bawdyhouse on Monday morning, after what I did to Cynbe." Nonetheless, Heim was glad to leave obstacles behind and submerge. He went to the greatest admissible depth, set the pilot for a southeasterly course, and began peeling off his wet clothes.

Vadasz regarded him with awe. "Gunnar," he said, in a tone suggesting he was not far from tears, "I will make a ballad about this, and it will not be good enough, but still they will sing it a thousand years hence. Because your name will live that long."

"Aw, shucks, Endre. Don't make my ears burn."

"No, I must say what's true. How ever did you conceive it?"

Heim turned up the heater to dry himself. The ocean around—murky green, with now and then a curiously shaped fish darting by—would dissipate infrared radiation. He had an enormous sense of homecoming, as if again he were a boy on the seas of Gea. For the time being, it overrode everything else. The frailty and incompleteness of his triumph could be seen later; let him now savor it.

"I didn't," he confessed. "The idea sort of grew. Cynbe was eager to . . . be friends or whatever. I talked him into visiting Bonne Chance, in the hope something might turn up that I could use for a break. It occurred to me that probably none of his gang could swim, so the riverside looked like the best place. I asked to have you along because we could use German under their noses. Also, having two of us doubled the odds that one would get away."

Vadasz's deference cracked in a grin. "That was the most awful *Schweindeutsch* I have yet heard. You are no linguist."

Memory struck at Heim. "No," he said harshly. Trying to keep his hapiness a while, he went on fast: "We were there when I thought if I could pitch Cynbe in the drink, his guards would go all out to save him, rather than run along the bank shooting at us. If you can't swim yourself, you've got a tough job rescuing another nonswimmer."

"Do you think he drowned?"

"Well, one can always hope," Heim said, less callously than he sounded. "I wouldn't be surprised if they lost at least a couple of warriors fishing him out. But we've likely not seen the last of him. Even if he did drown, they can probably get him to a revival machine before brain decay sets in.—Still, while he's out of commission, things are apt to be rather muddled

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for the enemy. Not that the organization can't operate smoothly without him. But for a while it'll lack direction, as far as you and I are concerned, anyhow. That's the time we'll use to put well out to sea and call de Vigny."

"Why . . . yes, surely they can send a fast flyer to our rescue." Vadasz leaned back with a cat-outside-canary smile. "La belle Danielle is going to see me even before she expected. Dare I say, before she hoped?"

Anger sheeted in Heim. "Dog your hatch, you clotbrain!" he snarled. "This is no picnic. We'll be lucky to head off disaster."

"What—what—" Color left Vadasz's cheeks. He winced away from the big man. "Gunnar, did I say—"

"Listen." Heim slammed a fist on the arm of his seat. "Our amateur try at espionage blew up the whole shebang. Have you forgotten the mission was to negotiate terms to keep our people from starving? That's been dimmed. Maybe something can be done later, but right now we're only concerned with staying alive. Our plan for evacuating refugees is out the airlock too. Cynbe jumped to the conclusion that *Fox* herself is on this planet. He's recalled a lancer and a cruiser to supplement his flagship. Between them, those three can detect *Meroeth* raising mass, and clobber her. It won't do us any good to leave her doggo, either. They'll have air patrols with high-gain detectors sweeping the whole planet. So there goes de Vigny's nice hidey-hole at Lac aux Nuages. For that matter, with three ships this close to her position, *Fox* herself is in mortal danger.

"You blithering, self-centered rockhead! Did you think I was risking death just so we could escape? What the muck have we got to do with anything? Our people have got to be warned!"

With a growl, he turned to the inertial navigator panel. No, they weren't very far out yet. But maybe he should surface anyway, take his chances, to cry what he knew at this instant.

The boat pulsed around him. The heater whirred and threw waves of warmth across his hide. There was a smell of oil in the air. Outside the ports, vision was quickly blocked—as he had been blocked, thwarted, resisted and evaded at every turn. "Those ships will be here inside an Earth day," he said. "*Fox* better make for outer space, the rest of us for the woods."

"Gunnar—" Vadasz began.

"Oh, be quiet!"

The minstrel flushed and raised his voice. "No. I don't know what I have done to be insulted by you, and if you haven't the decency to tell me, that must be your affair. But I have something to tell you, Captain. We can't contact *Fox* in time."

"Huh?" Heim whirled.

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"Think for a moment. Diego has his big maser set erected near the lake. But morning is well along, and Diane is nearly full. It set for the Haute Garance hours ago. It won't rise again for, I guess, thirty hours."

"Satan . . . i . . . helvede," Heim choked. Strength drained from him. He felt the ache in his flesh and knew he had begun to grow old.

After a time in which he merely stared, Vadasz said to him, timidly: "You are too much a man to let this beat you. If you think it so important, well, perhaps we can get *Meroeth* aloft. Her own communicator can reach the moon. The enemy satellites will detect her, and the cruiser close in. But she is lost anyway, you inform me, and she can surrender. We only need three or four men to do it. I will be one of them."

Lightning-struck, Heim sprang to his feet. His head bashed the canopy. He looked up and saw a circle of sunlight, blinding on the ocean surface, above him.

"Are you hurt?" Vadasz asked.

"By heaven—and hell—and everything in between." Heim offered his hand. "Endre, I've been worse than a bastard. I've been a middle-aged adolescent. Will you forgive me?"

Vadasz gripped hard. Perception flickered in his eyes. "Oh, so," he murmured. "The young lady. . . . Gunnar, she's nothing to me. Mere pleasant company. I thought you felt the same."

"I doubt that you do," Heim grunted. "Never mind. We've bigger game to hunt. Look, I happen to know what the orbits and starting positions of those ships were. Cynbe saw no reason not to tell me when I asked—I suppose unconsciously I was going on the old military principle of grabbing every piece of data that comes by, whether or not you think you'll ever use it. Well I also know their classes, which means I know their capabilities. From that, we can pretty well compute their trajectories. They can be pinpointed at any given time—close enough for combat purposes, but not close enough for their ground base to beam them any warning. Okay, so that's one advantage we've got, however small. What else?"

He began to pace, two steps to the cabin's end, two steps back, fist beating palm and jaw muscles standing in knots. Vadasz drew himself aside. Once more the cat's grin touched his mouth. He knew Gunnar Heim in that mood.

"Listen." The captain hammered out the scheme as he spoke. "*Meroeth*'s a big transport. So she's got powerful engines. In spite of her size and clumsiness, she can move like a hellbat when empty. She can't escape three ships on patrol orbit. But at the moment there's only one, Cynbe's personal *Jubalcho*. I don't know her orbit,

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but the probabilities favor her being well away at any given time that *Meroeth* lifts. She could pursue, sure, and get so close that *Meroeth* can't outrun a missile. But she ain't gonna—I hope—because Cynbe knows that wherever I am, *Fox* isn't likely very distant, and he's got to protect his base against *Fox* till his reinforcements arrive. Or if the distance is great enough, he'll assume the transport *is* our cruiser, and take no chances!

"So . . . okay . . . given good piloting, *Meroeth* has an excellent probability of making a clean getaway. She can flash a message to *Fox*. But then—what? If *Fox* only takes us aboard, we're back exactly where we started. No, we're worse off, because the New Europeans have run low on morale and losing their contact with us could well push them right into quitting the fight. So—wait—let me think—Yes!" Heim bellowed. "Why not? Endre, we'll go for broke!"

The minstrel shouted his answer.

Heim reined in his own eagerness. "The faster we move, the better," he said. "We'll call HQ at the lake immediately. Do you know Basque, or any other language the Aleriona don't that somebody on de Vigny's staff does?"

"I fear not. And a broadcast, such as we must make, will doubtless be monitored. I can use *Louchebeme,* if that will help."

"It might, though they're probably on to it by now. . . . Hm. We'll frame something equivocal, as far as the enemy's concerned. He needn't know it's us calling from a sub. Let him assume it's a maquisard in a flyer. We can identify ourselves by references to incidents in camp.

"We'll tell de Vigny to start lightening the spaceship as much as possible. No harm in that, since the Aleriona know we do have a ship on the planet. It'll confirm for them that she must be in the Haute Garance, but that's the first place they'd look anyhow." Heim tugged his chin. "Now . . . unfortunately, I can't send any more than that without tipping my hand. We'll have to deliver the real message in person. So we'll submerge right after you finish calling and head for a rendezvous point where a flyer is to pick us up. How can we identify that, and not have the enemy there with a brass band and the keys to the city?"

"Hm-m-m. Let me see a map." Vadasz unrolled a chart from the pilot's drawer. "Our radius is not large, if we are to be met soon. *Ergo*—Yes. I will tell them . . . so-and-so many kilometers due east of a place—" he blushed, pointing to Fleurville, a ways inland and down the Cote Notre Dame—"where Danielle Irribarne told Endre Vadasz there is a grotto they should visit. That was shortly before moonset. We, um, sat on a platform high in a tree and—"

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Heim ignored the hurt and laughed. "Okay, lover boy. Let me compute where we can be in that coordinate system."

Vadasz frowned. "We make risks, acting in this haste," he said. "First we surface, or at least lie awash, and broadcast a strong signal so near the enemy base."

"It won't take long. We'll be down again before they can send a flyer. I admit one might be passing right over us this minute, but probably not."

"Still, a New European vessel has to meet us. No matter if it goes fast and takes the long way around over a big empty land, it is in daylight and skirting a dragon's nest. And likewise for the return trip with us."

"I know." Heim didn't look up from the chart on his knees. "We could do it safer by taking more time. But then we'd be too late for anything. We're stuck in this orbit, Endre, no matter how close we have to skim the sun."

IX

"Bridge to stations, report."

"Engine okay," said Diego Gonzales.

"Radio and main radar okay," said Endre Vadasz.

"Gun Turret One okay and hungry," said Jean Irribarne. The colonists in the other emplacements added a wolfish chorus.

Easy, lads, Heim thought. *If we have to try those popguns on a real, functioning warship, we're dead.* "Stand by to lift," he called. Clumsy in his spacesuit, he moved hands across the board.

The lake frothed. Waves swept up its beaches. A sighing went among the trees, and *Meroeth* rose from below. Briefly her great form blotted out the sun, where it crawled toward noon, and animals fled down wilderness trails. Then, with steadily mounting velocity, she flung skyward. The cloven air made a continuous thunderclap. Danielle and Madelon Irribarne put hands to tormented ears. When the shape was gone from sight, they returned to each other's arms.

"Radar, report!" Heim called through drone and shiver.

"Negative," Vadasz said.

Higher and higher the ship climbed. The world below dwindled, humped into a curve, turned fleecy with clouds and blue with oceans. The sky went dark, the stars blazed forth.

"Signal received on the common band," Vadasz said. "They must have spotted us. Shall I answer?"

"Hell, no," Heim said. "All I want is her position and vector."

The hollow volume of *Meroeth* trapped sound, bounced echoes about, until a booming rolled from stem to stern and port to starboard. It throbbed in Heims skull. His open faceplate rattled.

"Can't find her, Vadasz told him. "She must be far off."

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But she found us. Well, she has professional detector operators. I've got to make do with whatever was in camp. No time to recruit better-trained people.

We should be so distant that she'd have to chase us for some ways to get inside the velocity differential of her missiles. And she should decide her duty is to stay put. If I've guessed wrong on either of those, we've hoisted our last glass. Heim tasted blood, hot and bitter, and realized he had caught his tongue between his teeth. He swore, wiped his face, and drove the ship.

Outward and outward. New Europe grew smaller among the crowding suns. Diane rose slowly to view. "Captain to radio room. Forget about everything else. Lock that maser and cut me in on the circuit." Heim reached for racked instruments and navigational tables. "I'll have the figures for you by the time you're warmed up."

If we aren't destroyed first. Please . . . let me live that long. I don't ask for more. Please, Fox *has got to be told.* He reeled off a string of numbers.

In his shack, among banked meters that stared at him like troll eyes, Vadasz punched keys. He was no expert, but the comsystem computer had been preprogrammed for him; he need merely feed in the data and punch the directive "Now." A turret opened to airlessness. A transceiver thrust its skeletal head out for a look at the universe. A tight beam of coherent radio waves speared from it.

There were uncertainties. Diane was orbiting approximately 200,000 kilometers on the other side of New Europe, and *Meroeth* was widening that gulf with ever-increasing speed. But the computer and the engine it controlled were sophisticated; the beam had enough dispersion to cover a fairly large circle by the time it reached the target area; it had enough total energy that its amplitude then was still above noise level.

Small, bestrewn with meteoric dust, in appearance another boulder among thousands on the slope of a certain crater wall, an instrument planted by the men from the boat sat waiting. The signal arrived. The instrument—an ordinary microwave relay, such as every spaceship carries by the score, with a solar battery—amplified the signal and bounced it in another tight beam to another object high on a jagged peak. That one addressed its next fellow; and so on around the jagged desert face of the moon. Not many passings were needed. The man's-height horizon on Diane is about three kilometers, much greater from a mountaintop, and the last relay only had to be a little ways into that hemisphere which never sees New Europe.

Thence the beam leaped skyward. Some 29,000 kilometers from the center of Diane, to *Fox II.*

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The problem had been: how could a spaceship lurk near a hostile planet from which detectors probed and around which warcraft spun? If she went free-fall, every system throttled down to the bare minimum, her neutrino emission would not register above the cosmic background. But optical, infrared, and radar eyes would still be sure to find her. Unless she interposed the moon between herself and the planet. . . . No. She dared not land and sit there naked to anyone who chanced close when the far hemisphere was daylit. She could not assume an orbit around the satellite, for she would move into view. She could not assume a concentric orbit around New Europe itself, for she would revolve more slowly and thus drop from behind her shield—

Or would she?"

Not necessarily! In any two-body system there are two Lagrangian points where the secondary's gravitation combines with the primary's in such a way that a small object put there will remain in place, on a straight line between the larger bodies. It is not stable; eventually the object will be perturbed out of its resting spot; but "eventually" is remote in biological time. *Fox* put herself in the more distant Lagrangian point and orbited in the moon-disc's effortless concealment.

The maneuver had never been tried before. But then, no one had ever before needed to have a warship on call, unbeknownst to an enemy who occupied the ground where he himself meant to be. Heim thought it would become a textbook classic, if he lived to brag about it.

"*Meroeth* to *Fox II*," he intoned. "*Meroeth* to *Fox II*. Now hear this and record. Record. Captain Heim to Acting Captain Penoyer, stand by for orders."

There could be no reply, except to Lac aux Nuages. The system, simple and hastily built, had been conceived in the belief that he would summon his men from there. If anything was heisenberg at the other end, he wouldn't know till too late. He spoke into darkness.

"Because of unexpected developments, we've been forced to lift directly, without passengers. It doesn't seem as if we're being pursued. But we have extremely important intelligence, and on that basis a new plan.

"First: we know there is only one capital ship in orbit around New Europe. All but two others are scattered beyond recall, and not due back for quite some time. The sentry vessel is the enemy flagship *Jubalcho*, a cruiser. I don't know the exact class—see if you can find her in Jane's—but she's doubtless only somewhat superior to *Fox*.

"Second: the enemy learned we were on the planet and recalled

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the two vessels in reach. They are presently accelerating toward New Europe. The first should already have commenced deceleration. That is the lancer *Savaidh*. The other is the cruiser *Inisant*. Check them out too; but I think they are ordinary Aleriona ships of their respective classes. The ballistic data are approximately as follows—" He recited the figures.

"Now, third: the enemy probably believes *Meroeth* is *Fox*. We scrambled with so much distance between that contrary identification would have been difficult or impossible, and also we took him by surprise. So I think that as far as he knows, *Fox* is getting away while the getting is good. But he cannot communicate with the other ships till they are near the planet, and he doubtless wants them on hand anyway.

"Accordingly we have a chance to take them piecemeal. Now hear this. Pay no attention to the lancer. *Meroeth* can deal with her; or if I fail she's no major threat to you. Moreover, nuclear explosions in space would be detected and alert the enemy. Stay put, *Fox*, and plot an interception for *Inisant*. She won't be looking for you. Relative velocity will be high. If you play your cards right, you have an excellent probablity of putting a missile in her while warding off anything she has time to throw.

"After that, come get me. My calculated position and orbit will be approximately as follows." Again a string of numbers. "If I'm a casualty, proceed at discretion. But bear in mind that New Europe will be guarded by only one cruiser!

Heim sucked air into his lungs. It was hot and had an electric smell. "Repeating message," he said. And at the end of the third time: "The primary relay point seems to be going under Diane's horizon, on our present course. I'll have to sign off. Gunnar Heim to Dave Penoyer and the men of *Fox II*—good hunting. Over and out.

Then he sat in his seat, looked to the stars in the direction of Sol, and wondered how Lisa his daughter was doing.

Increment by increment, *Meroeth* piled on velocity. It didn't seem long—though much desultory conversation had passed through the intercom—before the moment came to reverse and slow down. They mustn't have a suspicious vector when they encountered *Savaidh*.

Heim went to the saloon for a snack. He found Vadasz there, with a short redhaired colonist who slurped at his cup as if he had newly come off a Martian desert. *"Ah, mon Capitaine,"* the latter said cheerily, *"je n'avais pas bu de cafe depuis un sacre long temps. Merci beaucoup!"*

"You may not thank me in a while," Heim said.

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Vadasz cocked his head. "You shouldn't look so grim, Gun—sir," he chided. "Everybody else is downright cocky."

"Tired, I guess." Heim slumped onto the Aleriona settle.

"I'll fix you up. A *grand Danois* of a sandwich, hm?" Vadasz bounced out. When he returned with the food, he had his guitar slung over his back. He sat down on the table, swinging his legs, and began to chord and sing:

"There was a rich man and he lived in Jerusalem.

Glory, hallelujah, hi-ro-de-rung!—"

The memory came back. A grin tugged at Heim's lips. Presently he was beating time; toward the end, he joined in the choruses. *That's the way! Who says we can't take them?* He returned to the bridge with a stride of youth.

And time fled. And battle stations were sounded. And *Savaidh* appeared in the viewports.

The hands that had built her were not human. But the tool was for the same job, under the same laws of physics, as Earth's own lancers. Small, slim, leopard-spotted for camouflage and thermal control, leopard deadly and beautiful, the ship was so much like his old *Star Fox* that Heim's hand paused. *Is it right to kill her this way? A legitimate ruse of war. Yes.* He punched the intercom. "Bridge to radio. Bridge to radio. Begin distress signal."

Meroeth spoke, not in any voice but in the wailing radio pattern which Naval Intelligence had long known was regulation for Alerion. Surely the lancer captain (was this his first command?) ordered an attempt at communication. There was no reply. The gap closed. Relative speed was slight by spaceship standards; but *Savaidh* grew swiftly before Heim's eyes.

Unwarned, the Aleriona had no reason to doubt this was one of their own vessels. The transport was headed toward the Mach limit; not directly for The Eith, but then, none of them did lest the raider from Earth be able to predict their courses. Something had gone wrong. Her communications must be out. Probably her radio officer had cobbled together a set barely able to cry, "S O S!" The trouble was clearly not with her engines, since she was under power. What, then? Breakdown of radiation screening? Air renewal? Thermostats? Interior gee field? There were so many possibilities. Life was so terribly frail, here where life was never meant to be.

Or . . . since the probability of her passing near the warship by chance, in astronomical immensity, was vanishingly small . . . did she bear an urgent message? Something that, for some reason, could not be transmitted in the normal way? The shadow of *Fox II* lay long and cold across Alerion.

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"Close spacesuits," Heim ordered. "Stand by." He clashed his own faceplate shut and lost himself in the task of piloting. Two horrors nibbled at the edge of consciousness. The lesser one, because least likely, was that the other captain would grow suspicious and have him blasted. The worst was that *Savaidh* would continue her rush to Cynbe's help. He could not match accelerations with a lancer.

Needles wavered before his eyes. Radar—vectors—impulse—*Savaidh* swung about and maneuvered for rendezvous.

Heim cut drive to a whisper. Now the ships were on nearly parallel tracks, the lancer decelerating heavily while the transport ran almost free. Now they were motionless with respect to each other, with a kilometer of vacuum between. Now the lancer moved with infinite delicacy toward the larger vessel.

Now Heim rammed down an emergency lever. At full sidewise thrust, *Meroeth* hurtled to her destiny.

There was no time to dodge, no time to shoot. The ships crashed together. That shock roared through plates and ribs, ripped metal apart, hurled unharnessed Aleriona to their decks or against their bulkheads with bone-cracking violence.

A spaceship is not thickly armored, even for war. She can withstand the impact of micrometeorites; the larger stones, which are rare, she can detect and escape; nothing can protect from nuclear weapons, when once they have struck home. *Meroeth's* impact speed was not great, but her mass was. Through and through *Savaidh* she sheared. Her own hull gave way. Air puffed out in a frosty cloud, quickly lost to the light-years. Torn frameworks wrapped about each other. Locked in a stag's embrace, the ruined ships tumbled on a lunatic orbit. Aurore flared radiance across their guts; the stars looked on without pity.

"Prepare to repel boarders!"

Heim didn't know if his cry had been transmitted through his helmet jack to the others. Likely not. Circuits were ripped asunder. The fusion reaction in the power generator had guttered out. Darkness, weightlessness, airlessness flowed through the ship. It didn't matter. His men knew what to do. He undid his harness by feel and groped aft to the gun turret he had chosen for himself.

Most of the Aleriona crew must be dead. Some might survive, in spacesuits or sealed compartments. If they could find a gun still workable and bring it to bear, they'd shoot. Otherwise they'd try for hand-to-hand combat. Untrained for space, the New Europeans couldn't withstand that.

The controls of Heim's laser had their own built-in illumination. Wheels, levers, indicators glowed

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like watchfires. He peered along the barrel, out the cracked glasite, past wreckage where shadows slid weirdly as the system rotated; he suppressed the slight nausea due Coriolis force, forgot the frosty glory of constellations, and looked for his enemy.

It came to him, a flicker across tautness, that he had brought yet another tactic to space warfare: ramming. But that wasn't new. It went back ages, to when men first adventured past sight of land. *Olaf Tryggvason, on the blood-reddened deck of the* Long Serpent.

No. To hell with that. His busines was here and now: to stay alive till *Fox* picked him up. Which wouldn't be for a long time.

A weapon spat. He saw only the reflection of its beam off steel, and squinted till the dazzle passed. *One for our side. I hope.* A heavy vibration passed through the hull and his body. An explosion? He wasn't sure. The Aleriona might be wild enough to annihilate him, along with themselves, by touching off a nuclear warhead. The chances were against it, since they'd need tools that would be hard to find in that mess out yonder. But—

Well, war was mostly waiting.

A spacesuited figure crawled over a girder. The silhouette was black and unhuman against the stars, save where sunlight made a halo on the helmet. One survivor, at least, bravely striving to— Heim got him in the sights and fired. Vapor rushed from the pierced body. It drifted off into space. "I hated to do that," Heim muttered to the dead one. "But you could have been carrying something nasty, you know."

His shot had given him away. A beam probed at his turret. He crouched behind the shield. Intolerable brightness gnawed centimeters away from him. Then more bolts struck. The enemy laser winked out. "Good man!" Heim gasped. "Whoever you are!"

The fight did not last long. No doubt the Aleriona, if any were left, had decided to hole up and see what happened. But it was necessary to remain on guard.

In the dreamlike state of free fall, muscles did not protest confinement. Heim let his thoughts drift where they would. Earth, Lisa, Jocelyn . . . New Europe, Danielle . . . there really wasn't much in a man's life that mattered. But those few things mattered terribly.

Hours passed.

It was anticlimax when *Fox's* lean shape closed in. Not that Heim didn't cheer—so she had won!—but rendezvous was tricky; and then he had to make his way through darkness and ruin until he found an exit; and then signal with his helmet radio to bring a tender into safe jumping distance;

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and then come aboard and get a shot to counteract the effects of the radiation he had taken while unscreened in space; and then transfer to the cruiser—

The shouts and backslappings, bear hugs and bear dances, seemed unreal in his weariness. Not even his victory felt important. He was mainly pleased that a good dozen Aleriona were alive and had surrendered. "You took *Inisant?*" he asked Penoyer.

"Oh, my, yes. Wizard cum spiff! One pass, and she was a cloud of isotopes. What next, sir?"

"Well—" Heim rubbed sandy eyes. "Your barrage will have been detected from New Europe. Now, when *Inisant* is overdue, the enemy must realize who lost. He may have guessed you went after *Savaidh* next, and be attempting an interception. But it's most likely that he's stayed pretty close to base. Even if he hasn't, he'll surely come back there. Do you think we can beat *Jubalcho?*"

Penoyer scowled. "That's a pitchup, sir. According to available data, she has more teeth, though we've more acceleration. I've computed several tactical patterns which give us about an even chance. But should we risk it?"

"I think so," Heim said. "If we get smeared, well, let's admit that our side won't have lost much. On the other hand, if we win we've got New Europe.

"Sir?"

"Sure. There are no other defenses worth mentioning. We can knock out their ground-based missiles from space. Then we give air support to the colonists, who're already preparing a march on the seaboard. You know as well as I do, no atmospheric flyer ever made has a fish's chance on Friday against a nuclear-armed spaceship. If the Aleriona don't surrender, we'll simply swat them out of the sky, and then go to work on their ground troops. But I expect they will give in. They're not stupid. And . . . then *we've* got hostages."

"But—the rest of their fleet—"

"Uh-huh. One by one, over a period of weeks or months, they'll come in. *Fox* should be able to bushwhack them. Also, we'll have the New Europeans hard at work, finishing the space defenses. Evidently there isn't much left to do there. Once that job's completed, the planet's nearly impregnable, whatever happens to us.

"Somewhere along the line, probably rather soon, another transport ship will come in, all unsuspecting. We'll nobble her and send off a load of New Europeans as originally planned. When Earth hears they're not only not dead, not only at the point of defeat, but standing space siege and doing a crackling hell of a job at it . . . why, if Earth doesn't move then, I resign from the human race."

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Heim straightened. "I'm no damned hero, Dave." he finished. "Mainly I want to get home to the pipe and slippers. But don't you think a chance like this is worth taking?"

Penoyer's nostrils flared. "By . . . by Jove," he stammered, "*Yes.*"

"Very good. Make course for New Europe and call me if anything happens."

Heim stumbled to his cabin and toppled into sleep.

Vadasz's hand shook him awake. "Gunnar! Contact's made —with *Jubalcho*—we'll rendezvous inside half an hour."

Nothing remained of tiredness, fear, doubt, nor even anger. Heim went to the bridge with more life running through his veins than ever since Connie departed. Stars filled the viewports, so big and bright in the crystal dark that it seemed he could reach out and touch them. The ship murmured and pulsed. His men stood by their weapons; he could almost sense their oneness with him and with her. He took his place of command, and it was utterly right that Cynbe's voice should ring from the speaker.

"*Star Fox* captain, greet I you again? Mightily have we striven. You refuse not battle this now?"

"No," said Heim. "We're coming in. Try and stop us."

The laughter of unfallen Lucifer replied. "Truth. And I thank you, my brother. Let come what that time-flow brings that you are terrible enough to live with . . . I thank you for this day."

"Goodbye," Heim said, and thought, a little surprised, *Why, that means "God be with you."*

"Captain of mine," Cynbe sang, "fare you well."

The radio beams cut out. Dark and silent, the two ships moved toward their meeting place.

X

A hundred kilometers north of Bonne Chance, on a high and lovely headland where meadows and woods ran wind-rippled down to the sea, was a house which had been made a gift of honor.

Rear Admiral Moshe Peretz, commanding blastship *Jupiter,* Deepspace Fleet of Earth's World Federation, set his borrowed flyer down on the landing strip and went out. A fresh breeze swayed the nearby garden, clouds scudded white, sunlight speared between them to dance on a restless ocean. He walked slowly, a short man, very erect in his uniform, with combat ribbons on his breast that freed him to admire a view or a blossom.

Gunnar Heim came out to welcome him, also in uniform: but his was different, gray tunic, a red stripe down the trousers, a fleur-de-lys on the collar. He towered over his guest, bent down a face

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that had known much sun of late, grinned in delight and engulfed the other man's hand in one huge paw. "Hey, Moshe, it's good to see you again! How many years?"

"Hello," Peretz said.

Heim released him, stung and surprised. "Uh . . . anything wrong?"

"I am all right, thank you. This is a nice home you have."

"Well, I like it. Want to see the grounds before we go in?"

"If you wish."

Heim stood for a moment before he sighed and said, "Okay, Moshe. Obviously you accepted my dinner invitation for more reasons than to jaw with your old Academy classmate. Want to discuss 'em now? There'll be some others coming pretty soon."

Peretz regarded him closely, out of brown eyes that were also pained, and said, "Yes, let us get it over with."

They started walking across the lawn. "Look at the matter from my side," Peretz said. "Thanks to you, Earth went into action. We beat the Aleriona decisively in the Marches, and now they have sued for peace. Wonderful. I was proud to know you. I pulled every wire in sight so that I could command the ship that went officially to see how New Europe is doing, how Earth can help reconstruct, what sort of memorial we should raise for the dead of both planets —because victory was not cheap."

"Haven't your men been well treated?" Heim asked.

"Yes, certainly." Peretz sliced the air with his hand, as if chopping at a neck. "Every liberty party has been wined and dined till it could hardly stagger back to the tender. But . . . I issued those passes most reluctantly, only because I did not want to make a bad situation worse. After all—when we find this planet ringed with defense machines—machines which are not going to be decommissioned—when a ship of the World Federation is told how near she may come—what do you expect a Navy man to think?"

Heim bit his lip. "*Ja.* That was a mistake, ordering you around. I argued against it in council, but they outvoted me. I give you my oath no insult was intended, not by anyone. The majority feeling was simply that we'd better express our sovereignty at the outset. Once the precedent has been accepted, we'll relax."

"But *why?*" His rage flickered to death, leaving Peretz no more than hurt and bewildered. "This fantastic declaration of independence . . . what kind of armed forces have you? Your fleet can't amount to more than your own old privateer and perhaps a few Aleriona prizes. Otherwise there is just the constabulary. What strength can half a million people muster?"

"Are you threatening us, Moshe?" Heim asked gently.

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"What?" Peretz jarred to a stop and gaped. "What do you mean?"

"Is Earth going to reconquer us? You could, of course. It'd be bloody and expensive, but you could."

"No—no—did the occupation drive everyone here paranoid?"

Heim shook his head. "On the contrary, we rely on Earth's good will and sense. We expect you to protest, but we know you won't use force. Not when your planet and ours have shed blood together."

"But . . . see here. If you want national status, well, that concerns mainly yourselves and the French government. But you say you are leaving the whole Federation!"

"We are," Heim answered. "Juridically, at least. We hope to make mutually beneficial treaties with Earth as a whole, and we'll always stand in a special relationship to France. In fact, President de Vigny thinks France won't object at all, will let us go with her blessings."

"M-m-m . . . I am afraid he is right," said Peretz grimly. He began walking again, stiff-gaited. "France is still rather cool toward the Federation. She won't leave it herself, but she will be glad to have you do so for her, as long as French interests are not damaged."

"She'll get over her grudge," Heim predicted.

"Yes, in time. Did you break loose for the same cause?"

Heim shrugged. "To a certain extent, no doubt. The Conference of Chateau de St. Jacques was one monstrous emotional scene, believe me. The plebiscite was overwhelmingly in favor of independence. But there were better reasons than a feeling of having been let down in an hour of need. Those are the ones that'll last."

"De Vigny tried to convince me," Peretz snorted.

"Well, let me try in less elegant language. What is the Federation? Something holy, or an instrument for a purpose? We think it's a plain old instrument, and that it can't serve its purpose out here."

"Gunnar, Gunnar, have you forgotten all history? Do you know what a breakup would mean?"

"War," Heim nodded. "But the Federation isn't going to die. With all its faults, it's proved itself too good for Earth to scrap. Earth's a single planet, though. You can orbit it in ninety minutes. The nations have got to unify, or they'll kill each other." His gaze swept the horizon. "Here we have more room."

"But—"

"The universe is too big for any one pattern. No man can understand or control it, let alone a government. The proof is right at hand. We had to trick and tease and browbeat the Federation into doing what we could see, with our

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own eyes, was necessary—because it didn't see. It wasn't able to see. If a man is going to live throughout the galaxy, he's got to be free to take his own roads, the ones his direct experience shows him are best for *his* circumstances. And that way, won't the race realize all its potential? Is there any other way we can, than by trying everything out, everywhere?" Heim clapped Peretz's back. "I know. You're afraid of interstellar wars in the future, if planets are sovereign. Don't worry. It's ridiculous. What do entire, self-sufficient, isolated worlds have to fight about?"

"We just finished an interstellar war," Peretz said.

"Uh-huh. What brought it on? Somebody who wasn't willing to let the human race develop as it should. Moshe, instead of trying to freeze ourselves into one shape, instead of staying small because we're scared of losing control, let's work out something different. Let's find how many kinds of society, human and nonhuman, can get along without a policeman's gun pointed at them. I don't think there is any limit."

"Well—" Peretz shook his head. 'Maybe. I hope you are right. Because you have committed us, blast you." He spoke without animosity.

After a minute: "I must confess I felt better when President de Vigny apologized officially for keeping our ship at arm's length."

"You have my personal apologies," Heim said low.

"All right!" Peretz thrust out his hand, features crinkled with abrupt laughter. "Accepted and forgotten, you damned old squarehead."

His trouble lifted from Heim, too. "Great!" he exclaimed. "Come on inside and we'll buckle down to getting drunk. Lord, how much yarning we've got to catch up on!"

They entered the living room and settled themselves. A maid curtsied. "What'll you have?" Heim asked. "Some items of food are still in short supply, and of course machinery's scarce, which is why I employ so many live servants. But these Frenchmen built big wine cellars."

"Brandy and soda, thanks," Peretz said.

"Me too. We *are* out of Scotch on New Europe. Uh . . . will there be cargoes from Earth soon?"

Peretz nodded. "Some are already on the way. Parliament will scream when I report what you have done, and there will be talk of an embargo, but you know that won't come to anything. If we aren't going to fight, to hold you against your will, it is senseless to antagonize you with annoyances."

"Which bears out what I said." Heim put the drink orders into French.

"Please, don't argue any more. I told you I have accepted your

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fait accompli." Peretz leaned forward. "But may I ask something, Gunnar? I see why New Europe did what it did. But you yourself —You could have come home, been a world hero, and a billionaire with your prize money. Instead you take citizenship here—well, blaze, they are nice people, but they aren't yours!"

"They are now," Heim said quietly.

He took out his pipe and tamped it full. His words ran on, almost of themselves:

"Mixed motives, as usual. I had to stay till the war was over. There was a lot of fighting, and afterward somebody must mount guard. And . . . well . . . I'd been lonely on Earth. Here I found a common purpose with a lot of absolutely first-class men. And a whole new world, elbow room, infinite possibilities. It dawned on me one day, when I was feeling homesick—what was I homesick for? To go back and rot among my dollars?

"So now, instead, I'm New Europe's minister of space and the navy. We're short of hands, training, equipment, everything; you name it and we probably haven't got it. But I can see us grow, day by day. And that's my doing!"

He struck fire and puffed. "Not that I intend to stay in government any longer than necessary," he went on. "I want to experiment with pelagic farming; and prospect the other planets and asteroids in this system; and start a merchant spaceship yard; and—shucks, I can't begin to tell you how much there is. I can't wait to become a private citizen again."

"But you do wait," Peretz said.

Heim looked out a window at sea and sun and sky. "Well," he said, "it's worth some sacrifice. There's more involved than this world. We're laying the foundations of—" he hunted for words—"admiralty. Man's, throughout the universe."

The maid came in with her tray. Heim welcomed her not only for refreshment, but as an excuse to change the subject. He wasn't much of a talker on serious matters. A man did what he must; that sufficed.

The girl ducked her head. *"Un voleur s'approche, Monsieur,"* she reported.

"Good," Heim said. "That'll be Endre Vadasz and his wife. You'll like them, Moshe. These days he's giving his Magyar genes full rein on a 10,000-hectare ranch in the Bordes Valley—but he's still one solar flare of a singer. You may already have heard his ballad about Admiral Cynbe."

"No. About who?"

A brief bleakness crossed Heim's eyes. "I'll tell you later. Someone Endre and I both thought should be remembered." He raised his glass. *"Skaal."*

"Shalom."

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Both men got up when the Vadaszes entered. *"Bienvenu,"* Heim said, shook his friend's hand with gladness and kissed Danielle's. By now he'd learned how to do that with authority.

It was a surprise, he thought as he looked at her, how fast a certain wound was healing. Life isn't a fairy tale; the knight who kills the dragon doesn't necessarily get the princess. So what? Who'd want to live in a cosmos less rich and various than the real one? You commanded yourself as you did a ship—with discipline, reasonableness, and spirit—and thus you came to port. By the time he fulfilled his promise to stand godfather to her firstborn, why, his feelings toward her would be downright avuncular.

No, he realized with a sudden quickening of blood, it wouldn't even take that long. The war was over. He could send for Lisa. He had little doubt that Jocelyn would come along.

A longer version of this novelet (also incorporating *Marque and Reprisal,* Feb. 1965 and *Arsenal Port,* April, 1965) will be published by Doubleday & Co. under the title *The Star Fox.*

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Frederic Brown, whose mastery of the short story form makes us regret that his name has not turned up in these pages more often, here collaborates with Carl Onspaugh in the ingenious and startling story of Dooley Hanks—musician, linguist, seeker of the Sound . . . killer.

EINE KLEINE NACHTMUSIK

by Fredric Brown and Carl Onspaugh

HIS NAME WAS DOOLEY HANKS and he was One of Us, by which I mean that he was partly a paranoiac, partly a schizophrenic, and mostly a nut with a strong *idee fixe*, an obsession. His obsession was that someday he'd find The Sound that he'd been looking for all his life, or at least all of his life since he had acquired a clarinet in his teens and learned how to play it. Truth to tell, he was only an average musician, but the clarinet was his rod and his staff, and it was the broomstick that enabled him to travel over the face of Earth, on all the continents, seeking The Sound. He'd play a gig here and a gig there and then, when he was ahead by a few dollars or pounds or drachmas or rubles, he'd take a walking tour until his money started to run out, then start for the nearest city big enough to let him find another gig.

He didn't know what The Sound would be like, but he knew that he'd know it when he heard it. Three times he'd *thought* he'd found it. Once, in Australia, the first time he'd heard a bull-roarer. Once, in Calcutta, in the sound of a musette played by a fakir to charm a cobra. And once, west of Nairobi, in the blending of a hyena's laughter with the voice of a lion. But the bull-roarer, on second hearing, was just a noise; the musette, when he'd bought it from the fakir and had taken it home, had turned out to be only a crude instrument with little range and not even a chromatic scale; the jungle sounds had resolved themselves finally into simple lion and hyena sounds.

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Actually Dooley Hanks had a great and rare talent that could have meant much more to him than his clarinet, a gift of tongues. He knew dozens of languages and spoke them all fluently and idiomatically. A few weeks in any country was enough for him to pick up the language and speak it like a native. But he had never tried to cash in on this talent, and never would. Mediocre player though he was, the clarinet was his love.

Currently, the language he had just mastered was German, picked up playing with a combo in a nightclub in Hanover, West Germany, and the money in his pocket was in marks. Now at the end of a day of hiking, augmented by one long lift in a Volkswagen, he stood in moonlight on the banks of the Weser River. Wearing his hiking clothes and with his good clothes in a haversack on his back. His clarinet case in his hand; he always carried it so, never trusting it to suitcase, when he used one, or to haversack when he was hiking.

Driven by a demon, and feeling suddenly an excitement that must be, that could only be, a hunch, a feeling that at long last he was really about to find The Sound. He was trembling a little; he'd never had the hunch this strongly before, not even with the lions and the hyenas, and that had been the closest.

But where? Here, in the water? Or in the next town? Surely no farther than the next town. The hunch was that strong. That tremblingly strong. Like the verge of madness, and suddenly he knew that he *would* go mad if he did not find it soon. Maybe he was a little mad already.

He stared over moonlit water. And suddenly something disrupted its surface, flashed silently white in the moonlight and was gone again. Dooley stared at the spot. A fish? There had been no sound, no splash. A hand? The hand of a mermaid swum upstream from the North Sea beckoning him? Come in, the water's fine? (But it wouldn't be; it would be *cold.*) Some supernatural water sprite? A displaced Rhine Maiden in the Weser?

But was it really a sign? Dooley, shivering now at what he was thinking, stood at the Weser's edge and imagined how it would be . . . wading out slowly from the bank, letting his emotions create the tune for the clarinet, tilting his head back as the water became deeper so that the instrument would stick out of the water after he, Dooley, was under it, the bell of the clarinet last to submerge. And the sound, whatever sound there was, being made by the bubbling water closing over them. Over him first and then the clarinet. He recalled the clichéd allegation, which he had previously viewed with iconoclastic contempt but now felt almost ready to accept, that a drowning person was treated to a

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swift viewing of his entire life as it flashed before his eyes in a grand finale to living. What a mad montage that would be! What an inspiration for the final gurglings of the clarinet. What a frantic blending of the whole of his wild, sweetly sad, tortured existence, just as his straining lungs expelled their final gasp into a final note and inhaled the cold, dark water. A shudder of breathless anticipation coursed through Dooley Hanks' body as his fingers trembled with the catch on the battered case.

But *no,* he told himself. Who would hear? Who would know? It was important that someone hear. Otherwise his quest, his discovery, his entire life would be in vain. What good was The Sound if it brought him death and not immortality?

A blind alley. Another blind alley. Perhaps the next town. Yes, the next town. His hunch was coming back now. How had he been so foolish as to think of drowning? To find The Sound, he'd kill if he had to—but not himself.

Feeling as one who had had a narrow escape, he turned and walked away from the river, back to the road that paralleled it, and started walking into the next town, rapidly because it was still early evening and he'd have plenty of time, after checking in at a hotel to get rid of his haversack, to explore the town a while before they rolled up the sidewalks.

A fog was rolling in. He got well into the town. It was an old town with dark, narrow streets and ancient buildings. The fog curled in from the river like a giant serpent hugging the street at first, then swelling and rising slowly to blot and blur his vision. But through it, across a cobbled street, he saw a lighted hotel sign. The place looked inexpensive and that was what he wanted. He took a room and carried his haversack up to it. He hesitated whether to change to his good suit, and decided not to. He wouldn't be looking for an engagement tonight; tomorrow would be time for that. But he'd carry his clarinet, of course. He might find a place to meet other musicians, maybe be asked to sit in with them.

At the desk on his way out he asked for directions toward the center of town, the lively spots. Outside, he started in the direction indicated, but the streets were so crooked, the fog so thick, that he was lost within a few blocks. So he wandered on aimlessly and in another few blocks found himself in a somehow eerie neighborhood. Unnerved, for a panicked moment he started to walk fast to get through as quickly as he could, but then he stopped short as he suddenly became aware of music in the air—a weird, haunting whisper of music that, after he had listened to it a long moment, drew him along the dark street in search of its source. It seemed to be a single instrument

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playing, a reed instrument that didn't sound exactly like a clarinet or exactly like an oboe. It grew louder, then faded again. He looked in vain for a light, a movement, some clue to its birthplace. He turned to retrace his steps, walking on tiptoe now, and the music grew louder again. A few more steps and again it faded and Dooley retraced those few steps and paused to scan the somber, brooding buildings. There was no light behind any window. But the music was all around him now and—could it be coming up from below? Up from under the sidewalk?

He took a step toward the building, and saw what he had not seen before. Parallel to the building front, open and unprotected by a railing, a flight of worn stone steps led downward. And at the bottom of them, a yellow crack of light outlined three sides of a door. From behind that door came the music. And, he could now hear, voices in conversation.

He descended the steps cautiously and hesitated before the door, wondering whether he should knock or simply open it and walk in. Was it, despite the fact that he had not seen a sign anywhere, a public place? One so well known to its habitues that no sign was needed? Or perhaps a private party where he would be an intruder?

He decided to let the question of whether the door would or would not turn out to be locked against him answer that question. He put his hand on the latch and it opened to his touch and he stepped inside.

The music reached out and embraced him tenderly. The place was a wine cellar. At the far end of a large room there were three huge wine tuns with spigots. There were tables and people, men and women both, seated at them. All with wine glasses.

The musician was in a far corner of the room, sitting on a high stool. The room was almost as thick with smoke as the street had been thick with fog and Dooley's eyes weren't any too good anyway; from that distance he couldn't tell what the musician's instrument was.

He closed the door behind him, and weaved his way through the tables, looking for an empty one as close to the musician as possible. He found one not too far away and sat at it. He began to study the instrument with his eyes as well as his ears. It looked familiar. He'd seen one like it or almost like it somewhere, but where?

"Ja, mein Herr?" It was whispered close to his ear, and he turned. A fat little waiter in *liederhosen* stood at his elbow. "Zinfandel. Burgundy. Riesling."

Dooley knew nothing about wines and cared less, but he named one of the three, in a whisper. And as the waiter tiptoed away, he put a little pile of marks on the table so he wouldn't have to interrupt himself when the wine came.

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Then he studied the instrument again, trying for the moment *not* to listen to it, so he could concentrate on where he'd once seen something like it. It was about the length of his clarinet, with a slightly larger, more flaring, bell. It was made—all in one piece, as far as he could tell—of some dark rich wood somewhere in color between dark walnut and mahogany, highly polished. It had finger holes and only three keys, two at the bottom to extend the range downward by two semitones, and a thumb-operated one at the top that would be an octave key.

He closed his eyes, and would have closed his ears had they operated that way, to concentrate on remembering where he'd seen something very like it. Where?

It came to him gradually. A museum, somewhere. Probably in New York because he'd been born and raised there, hadn't left there until he was twenty-four, and this was longer ago than that, like when he was still in his teens. There had been a room or several rooms of glass cases displaying ancient and medieval musical instruments; violas da gamba and violas d'amor, sackbuts and Panpipes and shawms, lutes and tambours and fifes. And one glass case had held only hautboys, precursors of the modern oboe. And this instrument, the one to which he was listening now in thrall was a hautboy. Yes, there'd been a three-keyed version, identical to this one except that it had been light wood instead of dark. And later there'd been a book about ancient instruments in his high school library and he'd read it. It had said—Good God, it had said that the hautboy had a coarse tone in the lower register and was shrill on the high notes! A flat lie, if this instrument was typical. It was smooth as honey throughout its range; it had a rich full-bodied tone infinitely more pleasing than the thin reediness of an oboe. Better even than a clarinet; only in its lower, or chalumeau, register could a clarinet even approach it.

And Dooley Hanks knew beyond certainty that he had to have an instrument like that, and that he *would* have one, no matter what he had to pay or do to get it.

And with that decision irrevocably made, and with the music still caressing him like a woman and exciting him as no woman had ever excited him, Dooley opened his eyes. And since his head had tilted forward while he had concentrated, the first thing he saw was the vary large goblet of red wine that had been placed in front of him. He picked it up and, looking over it, managed to catch the musician's eye; Dooley raised the glass in a silent toast and downed the wine in a single draught.

When he lowered his head after drinking he studied the musician. The man was tall but thin and frail looking, his age indetermin-

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ate. He was somewhat seedy in appearance; his threadbare coat did not match his unpressed trousers and a garish red and yellow striped muffler hung loosely around his scrawny neck, which had a prominent Adam's apple that bobbed every time he took a breath to play. His touseled hair needed cutting, his face was thin and pinched, and his eyes so light a blue that they looked faded. Only his fingers bore the mark of a master musician; long and slim and gracefully tapered, they danced nimbly in time with the wondrous music they shaped.

Then with a final skirl of high notes that startled Dooley because they went at least half an octave above what he'd thought was the instrument's top range and still had the rich resonance of the lower register, the music stopped.

There was a few seconds of what seemed almost stunned silence, and then applause started and grew. Dooley went with it, and his palms started to smart with pain. The musician, staring straight ahead, didn't seem to notice. And after less than thirty seconds he again raised the instrument to his mouth and the applause died suddenly with the first note he played.

Dooley felt a gentle touch on his shoulder and looked around. The fat little waiter was back. This time he didn't even whisper, just raised his eyebrows. When he'd left with the empty glass, Dooley again gave full attention to the music.

Music? Yes, it was music, but not any *kind* of music he'd ever heard before. Or it was a blend of *all* kinds of music, ancient and modern, jazz and classical, a masterful blend of opposites, sweet and bitter, ice and fire, soft breezes and raging hurricanes, love and hate.

Again when he opened his eyes a filled glass was in front of him. This time he sipped slowly at it.

The music stopped and again he joined in the hearty applause. This time the musician got down from the stool and acknowledged the applause with a jerky little bow, and then, tucking his instrument under his arm, he walked rapidly across the room—unfortunately not passing near Dooley's table—with an awkward forward-leaning gait. Dooley turned his head to follow with his eyes. The musician sat down at a very small table, a table for one since it had only one chair, against the opposite wall. Dooley considered taking his own chair over, but decided against it. Apparently the guy wanted to sit alone or he wouldn't have taken that particular table.

Dooley looked around till he caught the little waiter's eye and signaled to him. When he came, Dooley asked him to take a glass of wine to the musician, and also to ask the man if he would care to join him at Dooley's table, to tell him that Dooley too was a musician and would like to get to know him.

"I don't think he will," the wai-

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ter told him. "People have tried it before and he has always politely refused. As for the wine, it is not necessary; several times an evening we pass a hat for him. Someone is starting to do so now, and you may contribute that way if you wish."

"I wish," Dooley told him. "But take him the wine and give him my message anyway, please."

"*Ja, mein Herr.*"

The waiter collected a mark in advance and then went to one of the three tuns and drew a glass of wine. Dooley, watching, saw the waiter put the glass on the musician's table and, talking, pointed toward Dooley. So there would be no mistake, Dooley stood and made a slight bow in their direction.

The musician stood also and bowed back, slightly more deeply and from the waist. But then he turned back to his table and sat down again and Dooley knew his first advance had been declined. Well, there'd be other chances, and other evenings. He sat back down again and took another sip of his wine.

The hat came, "for the musician," passed by a stolid red-faced burgher, and Dooley, seeing no large bills in it and not wishing to make himself conspicuous, added a few marks from his little pile on the table.

A few minutes later he got a chance to signal for more wine and when it was brought he held the little waiter in conversation. "I gather our friend turned down by invitation," he said. "May I ask what his name is?"

"Otto, *mein Herr.*"

"How long has he been playing here?" Dooley asked.

"Oh, just tonight. He travels around. Tonight is the first we've seen him in almost a year. When he comes, it's just for one night and we let him play and pass the hat for him. Ordinarily we don't have music here."

Dooley frowned. He'd have to make *sure,* then, to make contact tonight. He asked, "How soon will he play again?"

"Oh, no more tonight. A minute ago, just as I was bringing your wine, I saw him leave. We may not see him again for a long . . ."

But Dooley had grabbed his clarinet case and was running on a twisting course between tables. Through the door without even bothering to close it, and up the stone steps to the sidewalk. The fog was less thick now, except in patches. All he could hear for a moment were sounds from the wine cellar, then blessedly someone pulled shut the door he'd left open and in the silence that followed he thought, for a second, that he could hear footsteps to his right, the direction from which he had come.

He had nothing to lose, so he ran that way. There was a twist in the street and then a corner. He stopped and listened again, and—*that* way, he thought he heard the

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steps again and ran toward them. After half a block he could see a figure ahead, too far to recognize but thank God tall and thin; it must be the musician. And past the figure, dimly through the fog he could see lights and hear traffic noises. This must be the turn he had missed in trying to follow the hotel clerk's directions for finding the bright lights district.

He closed the distance to a quarter of a block, opened his mouth to call out to the figure ahead and found that he was too winded to call. He dropped from a run to a walk. No danger of losing the man now that he was this close to him. Getting his breath back, he closed the distance between them more slowly.

He was only a few paces behind the man—and, thank God, it *was* the musician—and was lengthening his strides to come up alongside him and speak when the man stepped down the curb and started diagonally across the street. Just as a speeding car, with what must have been a drunken driver, turned the corner behind them, lurched momentarily, then righted itself on a course bearing straight down on the unsuspecting musician. In sudden reflex action Dooley dashed into the street and pushed the musician from the path of the car. The impetus of Dooley's charge sent him crashing down on top of the musician and he sprawled breathlessly in this shielding position as the car passed so close that it sent out rushing fingers of air to tug as his clothing. Dooley raised his head in time to see the red eyes of its tail lights vanishing into the fog a block down the street.

Dooley listened to the drumming roll of his heart in his ears as he rolled aside to free the musician and both men got slowly to their feet.

"Was it close?"

Dooley nodded, breathing with difficulty.

The musician had taken his instrument from under his coat and was examining it. "Not broken," he said. But Dooley, realizing that his own hands were empty, whirled around to look for his clarinet case. And saw it. He must have dropped it when he raised his hands to push the musician. A wheel of the car must have run over it lengthwise for it was completely flattened. The case and every section of the clarinet were splintered, useless junk. He fingered it a moment and then walked over and dropped it into the gutter.

The musician came and stood beside him. "A pity," he said softly. "The loss of an instrument is like the loss of a friend."

An idea was coming to Dooley, so he didn't answer, but managed to look sadder than he felt. The loss of the clarinet was a blow in the pocketbook, but not an irrevocable one. He had enough to buy a used, not-so-hot one to start out with and

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he'd have to work harder and spend less for a while until he could get a really good one like the one he'd just lost. Three hundred it had cost him. Dollars, not marks. Right now, though, he was much *much* more interested in getting the German musician's hautboy, or one just like it. Three hundred dollars, not marks, was peanuts to what he'd give for *that*. And if the old boy felt responsible and offered . . .

"It was my fault," the musician said. "For not looking. I wish I could afford to offer to buy you a new—It was a clarinet, was it not?"

"Yes," Dooley said, trying to sound like a man on the brink of despair instead of one on the brink of the greatest discovery of his life. "Well, what's kaput is kaput. Shall we go somewhere for a drink and have a wake?"

"My room," said the musician. "I have brandy there. And we'll have privacy so I can play a tune or two I do not play in public. Since you too are a musician." He chuckled. "*Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, eh? *A little nightmusic*—but my own, not Mozart's."

Dooley managed to conceal his elation and to nod as though he didn't care much. Okay. My name's Dooley."

The musician held out his hand. "Call me Otto, Dooley."

It wasn't far, just a block down the next side street. The musician turned in at an old, dark house. He opened the door with a key and then used a small pocket flashlight to guide them up a wide but uncarpeted staircase. The house, he explained on the way, was unoccupied and soon to be torn down, so there was no electricity. But the owner had given him a key and permission to use it while the house still stood; there were a few pieces of furniture and he got by. He liked being in a house all by himhour without bothering anyone.

He opened the door of a room and went in. Dooley waited in the doorway until the musician had lighted an oil lamp on the dresser, and then followed him in. Besides the dresser there were only a straight chair, a rocker, and a single bed.

"Sit down, Dooley," the musician told him. "You'll find the bed more comfortable than the straight chair. If I'm going to play for us, I'd like the rocker." He was taking two glasses and a bottle out of the top drawer of the dresser.

Dooley could hardly restrain himself from asking permission right away to try the hautboy himself, but felt it would be wiser to wait. He sat down on the bed.

The musician handed Dooley a huge glass of brandy, then got his in his other hand, went to the rocker. He raised the glass. To music, Dooley."

"To a little nightmusic," said Dooley. He drank off a goodly sip, and it burned like fire, but it was good brandy. Then he could wait

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no longer. "Otto, mind if I look at that instrument of yours? It's a hautboy, isn't it?"

"A hautboy, yes. Not many would recognize it, even musicians. But I'm sorry, Dooley. I can't let you handle it. Or play it, if you were going to ask that, too. I'm sorry, but that's the way it is, my friend."

Dooley nodded and tried not to look glum. The night is young, he told himself. Meanwhile, he might as well find out as much as he could.

"Is it—your instrument, I mean, a real one? I mean, a medieval one? Or a modern reproduction?"

"I made it myself, by hand. A labor of love. But, my friend, stay with clarinet, I advise you. Especially do not suggest I try to make you one like this; I could not. I have not worked with tools for many years. I would find my skill is gone."

Dooley leaned forward. "Where could I find one even something like yours?"

The musician shrugged. "Most are in museums. You might find a few collections of ancient instruments in private hands, and buy one at an exorbitant price—and you might even find it still playable. But, my friend, be wise and stay with your clarinet."

Dooley could not say what he was thinking, and didn't speak.

"Tomorrow we talk about finding you a new clarinet," the musician said. "Tonight, let us forget it. And forget your wish for a hautboy, even your wish to play this one—yes, I know you asked only to touch and handle, but could you hold it in your hands without wanting to put it to your lips? Let us drink some more and then I will play for us. Prosit!"

They drank again. The musician asked Dooley to tell something about himself, and Dooley did. Almost everything about himself except what mattered most—his obsession and the fact that he would kill for it if there was no other way.

But there was no hurry. The worst that could happen, Dooley thought, was that he might drink too much and fall asleep before accomplishing his purpose—but if he fell asleep here, there'd be the morning. Maybe the morning would be better in any case; Dooley was a little drunk already.

They drank some more. The musician had opened a second bottle.

Finally he said, "I play now," and played. And again, as at the wine cellar, it was ice and fire, love and hate, sweet and bitter. Dooley lay back on the bed with his head against the wall and closed his eyes to listen.

After a while the music paused and the musician asked, "Dooley, are you asleep?"

"No," said Dooley.

"If you do sleep, it's all right. I can sleep in this rocker. I often

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do. So you needn't try to stay awake. But meanwhile—Dooley, outside of letting you try the instrument yourself, and this I cannot do, is there anything I can do for you that would make this night more happy for you?"

"Do for me?" Dooley tried to collect his thoughts.

"Yes. Some small token of my gratitude. What would you like most right now?"

"A girl," Dooley murmured sleepily.

The musician chuckled. "Blond, brunette or titian?"

"All kinds," Dooley answered airly. "A whole roomful." He laughed giddily at his own absurdity. "Bring 'em on, Otto."

The musician started to play again. But a different tune this time, one that was lilting but sensual. So beautiful that it hurt, and Dooley for a moment thought fiercely, "Damn him, he's playing *my instrument; he owes it to me* for the clarinet." And almost he decided not to wait till morning, to get up *now* and—

But before he could move, he became aware of another sound somewhere, over or under the music. It seemed to come from outside, from the sidewalk below, and it was a rapid click-click-clickety-click for all the world like the sound of high heels, and then it was closer, and it *was* the sound of heels, many heels, on the wood of the uncarpeted staircase—and then there was a gentle tap-tap at the door. Dreamily, Dooley turned his head toward the door and opened his eyes. The door swung open and girls poured into the room and surrounded him, engulfing him in their physical warmth and softness, and their exotic perfumes. Dooley gazed and reached in blissful disbelief, and then suspended the disbelief; if this was illusion, let it be illusion, if he was dreaming, let him stay asleep.

There were brown-eyed brunettes, black-eyed blondes and green-eyed redheads. And blue-eyed brunettes, green-eyed blondes and brown-eyed redheads. They were all sizes from petite to statuesque and they were all beautiful. A roomful of them.

Somehow the oil lamp seemed to dim itself without going out, and the music, growing wilder now, seemed to come from somewhere else, as though the musicians were elsewhere and Dooley alone in the room with the girls, and Dooley thought that was considerate of the musician. Soon he was romping with the girls in reckless abandon, sampling here and there like a small boy in a candy store. Or like a Roman at an orgy, but the Romans never had it so good, nor the gods on Mount Olympus.

At last, wonderfully exhausted, he lay back on the bed and, still surrounded by fragrant girl-flesh, he slept.

And woke, suddenly and com-

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pletely and soberly, he knew not how long later. But the room was cold now; perhaps that was what had awakened him. He opened his eyes and saw that he was alone on the bed and that the lamp was again (or still?) burning brightly holding back the darkness that pressed against the window panes. And the musician was there too, sound asleep in the rocking chair. The instrument was gripped in both his hands and that red and yellow striped muffler was still around his scrawny neck. His head was tilted backward against the rocker's back.

Had it really happened, the girls? Or had the music put him to sleep so he'd dreamed it, having made the suggestion to his own subconscious when he'd made a ridiculous and impossible request of the musician.

But that didn't matter. All that mattered was that the hautboy was and that now was the time for him to take it. But did he *have* to kill to get it? Yes, if he simply stole it from the sleeping man he'd never stand a chance of getting out of Germany with it. Otto knew his right name, as it was on his passport and they'd be waiting for him at the border. Whereas if he killed, the body—left behind in an abandoned house—might not be found for weeks, not until he was safe back in America. By then any evidence against him, even his possession of the instrument, would be too thin to warrant extradition. He would claim Otto had given the instrument to him to replace the clarinet he'd lost saving Otto's life. He'd have no proof of that, but they'd have no proof to the contrary.

Quickly and quietly he got off the bed and stood before the sleeping man. It would be easy, for the means were at hand. The scarf, already around the thin neck, the ends crossed once and ready to his hands. Dooley took them, and pulled hard. At the same moment he put a knee on the hautboy in the musician's lap, so it could not fall to the floor. It was easy. The musician must have been older and more frail than Dooley had thought. His struggles were feeble and he died quickly.

Dooley felt for a heartbeat to make sure, and then picked up the instrument. Held it, at long last.

He trembled, not with reaction at having killed, but with eagerness at actually holding what he held. When would it be safe for him to try it? Not back at his hotel in the middle of the night, waking other guests.

No, here and now, in this abandoned house, would be his best and safest chance. Here and now, but softly and ready to quit right away if the instrument made with the squeaks and squeals so easy to produce on an as yet unmastered instrument. But he had an ineffable feeling that it wouldn't happen that way.

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He looked down and saw and felt that his fingers had fallen naturally into position over the finger-holes and keys. He watched them start, seemingly of their own volition, a little finger-dance. He made them stop moving and wonderingly put the instrument to his lips and breathed into it softly. And out came, softly, a clear, pure middle register tone, as rich and vibrant as any Otto had played. Cautiously, he raised a finger and then another and found himself starting a diatonic scale. And then made himself forget his fingers and just *think* the rest of the scale and let his fingers take over and they did, every tone pure. He let himself think a scale in another key and it played itself, and then an arpeggio or two. The instrument was *his* in both senses. He owned it and he could play it.

He decided that he might as well make himself comfortable, and went to the bed, lay back across it with his head and shoulders braced against the wall behind it, as he had lain while listening to Otto play. And put the instrument to his lips and played, this time not caring about volume; if any neighbors were awake and heard, they'd think it was Otto.

He played, and a thousand thoughts blended; again blended opposites became sadly gay tunes. He tried to remember the tune Otto had played that had brought the girls, or had made him dream that a roomful of girls had come.

The tune wouldn't come to him, but instead he found himself playing a strange tune, one he'd never heard before, but one that he knew instinctively belonged to this wonderful instrument. It was a calling, beckoning melody—as the girl music had been, but somehow sinister instead of sensual.

And then, as he played on, over or under the music he heard another sound. Not this time a click-click of high heels but a scraping, scrabbling sound, as of thousands of tiny clawed feet.

And then he saw as well as heard them as they suddenly poured out of many holes in the woodwork that he had not before noticed, and ran and jumped upon the bed and upon *him*. And as he found himself fighting them, suddenly the bits and pieces fell into place and by an effort that was to be the last one of his life, Dooley tore the accursed instrument from his mouth, and opened his mouth to scream. But they were all around and over him now—great ones, small ones, lean ones, brawny ones. . . . . And before he could scream out of his opened mouth the largest black rat, the one who led them, leaped up and closed his needle-sharp teeth into the end of Dooley's tongue and held on, and the scream aborning gurgled into silence.

And The Sound of feasting lasted far into the night in Hamelin town. ◄

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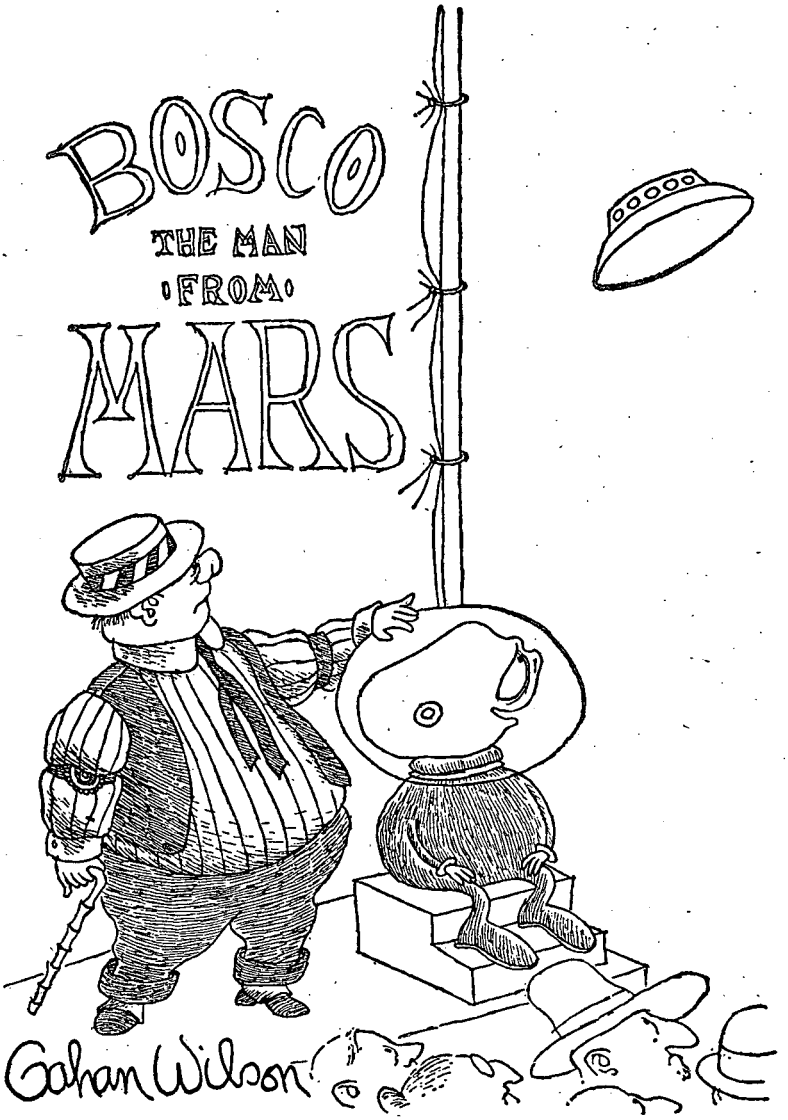

"Thank God!"

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BOOKS

WE ARE NOT ALONE, **Walter Sullivan**, McGraw-Hill, $6.95; 291 pp., plus bibliographies and index.

Sometimes it's hard to tell who's doing the chasing.

And if this seems a strange way to open a discussion of a serious non-fiction book by one of the nation's leading science writers—believe me, it is as appropriate as the Fortean title, which is to say: very much (and agreeably) so.

This extraordinary, detailed, documented, factual narrative is an account of the most exciting spy-and-suspense, chase-and-pursuit adventure ever undertaken by sober, industrious, learned, respected, and respectable men. It is also, if not exactly science *fiction*, still outstandingly the best book of science-fictional work (both as an imaginative exercise, *and* as absorbing drama) reviewed here this month, and probably for many months before and after.

But I was not really thinking about the content of the book when I started that way. It was the fact of the existence of the book I had in mind—and the more astonishing existence of the pursuit recounted in it. At the very least, it poses a challenging reply to the interminable query: "But isn't science overtaking science fiction?"

"Yes indeed. And science fiction is taking over science."

Mr. Sullivan opens with an account of the formation of an exclusive society known as The Order of the Dolphin.

> *In November, 1961, the most august scientific body in the United States convened a meeting at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory in Green Bank, West Virginia. While it was not held in secret, in the official sense, every effort was made to avoid publicity because of the sensational nature of the question to be discussed.*
>
> *The subject was Intelligent Extraterrestrial Life.*

The eleven men present were world-famous scientists in a variety of fields: physics, astronomy, biochemistry, communications. They were there at the request of the Space Science Board of the National Academy of Sciences. It was this group that constituted itself "The Order of the Dolphin." Why they did so—why they were

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there—what has happened since—what is likely to happen—all these things are Mr. Sullivan's story, and I do not intend to tell any of it here. But there are two things I do want to tell—

Some of the chapter headings, in the candid hope they will hook you: *Where to Look, Visitors from Space, Can They Visit Us? Is There Intelligent Life on Earth? Celestial Syntax.*

And something of the effect the book had on me:

Fifteen years ago, or close to it, I was privileged to watch a special preview of the movie, *Destination Moon,* shown on the Planetarium dome at the Museum of Natural History. I do mean "privileged," because (along with about half the total audience), I had not exactly been *invited*; I was just barely able to get hold of a press card and convince the folks at the door that I belonged.

As I said, I was not the only ardent fan there that day; the audience in the round room, necks bent back to watch the show projected on an artificial sky, was largely composed of people to whom the drama was a dream externalized. We watched the vivid scenes set outside the ship in empty space—watched them at a perspective that lent breathtaking realism to the illusion—and left, sighing, because we knew that what we had seen come to life that afternoon could not, conceivably, materialize completely in our own lifetimes . . . yet filled with glory, because the very fact that the movie had been made somehow guaranteed that the dream had 'caught,' that it would materialize, *some* day.

I will, I guess, watch the Gemini launching on television, but it will not have the same excitement or impact for me that the movie did. It will be only another part of the implementation of the dream, which had indeed 'caught,' and has been slowly fulfilling itself over the years since.

But for me at least, space itself, the physical objectives, are only curtain openers. It is not so much *what,* but *whom* we will find that keeps me looking way out there. And once again, I find myself sighing, because it will probably take too, too long—and exultant because Mr. Sullivan proclaims that WE ARE NOT ALONE—and *means* it, and says here, loud and clear, why he means it, and why the "Dolphins" do too.

WHITE LOTUS, John Hersey, Knopf, $6.95, 683 pp.

I am, in common with a great many other readers, an admirer of John Hersey. Unlike many of the others, I thought THE CHILD BUYER by a far cry his best book to date. It is disappointing to have to continue to feel so, after reading WHITE LOTUS. And since I

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am much more of a science fiction fan than a Hersey enthusiast, it is downright painful to have to say, of his first all-out science fiction novel, that it is a *dull* book. Most distressing of all, its faults are typical of the novice in the field, and of the amateur propagandist . . . yet Mr. Hersey is a writer of stature and experience, who has previously handled a marginally science fictional book magnificently, and who has in his other writings, repeatedly proven himself a highly skilled, effective, and restrained propagandist.

WHITE LOTUS is a lengthy parable of slavery and racial conflict, set in an alternate probability timestream where white America has long been subject to slave raids by the dominant yellow race. The story is told, in first person, by a young woman leader in the passive resistance movement of the whites in China. It covers a period of what I'd estimate to be at most twenty years, from the time of the capture of a fourteen-year-old girl in a raid on her Arizona village, through the confrontation of the Chinese authorities by White Lotus, symbol of the white civil rights movement. In the course of the book, the girl, White Lotus, lives through the experience of slavery, the impact of the abolitionist movement, the trading of slavery for freedom-in-prejudice, the beginning of egalitarianism, and the struggle in the white underground movement between the militant activists and the proponents of passive resistance.

The background of all this is China of (I infer) about the 1920's. I assume the Chinese background is entirely authentic —and suggest this is one of the serious flaws in the novel. World supremacy would surely have affected the Chinese personality and way of life as profoundly in another direction as (and this Mr. Hersey *did* understand) American subjugation changed the personality and culture of the White Lotus herself.

Perhaps the greatest problem is just that it is, as I said, a lengthy parable. It is not, in the usual science-fiction sense, a projection, but a simple transformation, East to West, white to yellow, black to white. At 68 pages it might have been great. 683 was far too many. Nor was the choice of narrative technique a wise one; parables are seldom best told from a subjective viewpoint; and a young girl's subjective view does not appear to be Hersey's strong point in any case.

Philip Dick did it better three years ago, in THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE.

THE THREE STIGMATA OF PALMER ELDRITCH, Philip K. Dick, Doubleday, $4.95; 278 pp.

Philip Dick did it better three

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years ago, in THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE.

I don't mean, this time, that his new book is similar in theme or treatment. Rather, that I wish it were more so, at least in characterizations and structure.

Phil Dick is, one might say, the best writer s-f has produced, on every third Tuesday. In between times, he ranges wildly from unforgiveable carelessness to craftsmanlike high competence. In the case of PALMER ELDRITCH, I would guess he did his thinking on those odd Tuesdays, or rather on *one* of them, and the actual writing in every possible minute before another Good Tuesday came on him.

Here is a riotous profusion of ideas, enough for a dozen novels, or one really good one; but the stuff is unsorted, frequently incompleted, seldom even clearly stated. The style is alternately dream-slow-surreal and fast-action-pulp. Thematically, he at least approaches, and sometimes stops to consider, virtually every current crucial issue: drug addiction, sexual mores, over-population, the economic structure of society, the nature of the religious experience, parapsychology, the evolution of man—you name it, you'll find it.

The book, with all this, is inevitably colorful, provocative, and (frustratingly) readable. I wish I thought it possible that Dick might some time go back to this one, publication notwithstanding, and finish writing it.

SUNBURST, Phyllis Gotlieb; Gold Medal, 40¢, 160 pp.

At thirteen, the only world Shandy Johnson knows is the ingrown, progressively degenerate, society of the walled and guarded town of Sorrel Park. Cut off from the world by an atomic accident in 1994, the city has now been isolated for a full generation, containing a secret the government is determined to keep hidden, and plagued with the atmosphere of fear and superstition emanating from the triply-guarded stronghold inside the city: the Dump.

In the Dump are the children whose existence must never be known: the mutants whose powerful *psi* talents pose a constant threat to progress-as-usual in the great outside world. And with them, inside, are a cross-section of non-*psi*s, guards, teachers, researchers, with a wide range of attitudes toward the mutants.

Shandy has no *psi* powers; she has lived, so far, in the dinginess and poverty of the town proper. Now, suddenly, the Dumper spy comes for her. Inside the Dump, three new worlds open up to her: the civilization of outside, represented by a scientist; the anarchy of the mutants; and her own self, with its unique "talent."

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New twists on a very old theme —certainly. So were Wilmar Shiras' OPENING DOORS and Zenna Henderson's PEOPLE. If this book falls short of full comparison with those, it is still a quietly effective, warmly convincing first novel by a writer whose scant handful of published stories has already taught me to watch for her byline.

MUTINY IN SPACE, **Avram Davidson;** Pyramid, 50¢, 159 pp.

Avram Davidson is a master of the short story form. He has an ear for dialogue and an eye for detail unsurpassed in this field, and not too often equalled outside it. With this, he has a rarer skill—precision: the ability to convey in a brief (sometimes exquisite) phrase, by intonation, connotation, linguistic induction, what wordier and less finely attuned writers may need paragraphs or pages of detail and denotation to accomplish. What he has once heard or seen, or even dreamed, he can, it seems, evoke unfailingly in the sharp polished prose of his short stories.

Unfortunately, MUTINY IN SPACE is a novel—and worse yet, one of the currently popular swords-and-spacery variety. (The Barbarians of the Spaceways neo-historical thing, full of great oaths and bloody slashings, nubile priestesses and lustful conquerors from the skies.) Davidson does it no worse, I suppose, than many of s-f's enduring hacks (and some at least of its now-brightest names) used to do in the old *Planet* and *Amazing*. But space-sailors' swearings and sweatings and lecherous lootings are not among the things he has seen or heard—or, it would seem, even dreamed. I doubt if anyone has—not like this.

They might better have called it AYESHA GOES TO THE STARS.

THE REASSEMBLED MAN, **Herbert D. Kastle,** Gold Medal, 45¢; 192 pp.

A Walter Mitty type hero is rebuilt to superior physical specs by meddling experimental extraterrestrial observers, and given strength, endurance, appearance, sexuality, beyond his wildest dreams.

A powerful concept is reduced to a plot gimmick by pedestrian handling, and given an underdeveloped, oversexed, pulp-paced, slick-glib treatment, well inside the author's proven capabilities.

It also seems to have a moral: it is best to be only a little bit better; being the best is too much. On the way to this conclusion, however, there are any number of interesting concepts and intriguing notions tossed out (and away)—as for instance, that super-energy entails super-hunger. A good book for commuters and tired-night

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reading—you can drift off and finish the thoughts for yourself.

BEYOND THE SOLAR SYSTEM, **Chesley Bonestell** and **Willy Ley**, Viking, $6.50; 93 pp., plus appendix, bibliography, index, and foreword by Wernher von Braun.

Third in the series of Bonestell-Ley astronautical pre-chartings, this has the usual relaxed, informative, and stimulating text by Willy Ley, and fourteen full-color paintings by Bonestell, most of which seemed to me to be just a bit usual also. In general, the star photographs from Palomar and Mt. Wilson were more effective for me, this time round. In particular, my favorite among the Bonestells here, a delicate sparkles-on-black-velvet painting of the Milky Way galaxy, comes a close second to the phenomenal California Institute of Technology color photo of the Ring Nebula in Lyra—which alone would be worth the price of the book, if Viking had not reduced the size to 7 x 10.5 this time.

As it is, the illustrations are only the most striking part of an excellent package, which includes a detailed and intriguing dictionary of the constellations.

LIFE AND DEATH OF THE SUN, **John Rublowsky**, Basic Books, $4.50, 129 pp. plus glossary, biographies.

Do not under any circumstances confuse this book with the excellent, informative, and readable text of similar title by George Gamow. The jacket on this one claims the book will appeal to everything from "bright junior high school students" to "students of astronomy at college." I doubt it.

The sun makes the wind blow and the rain fall. Its rays make the grass grow green. . . . Certainly the sun, blazing in the noon sky, is an impressive sight. . . . In the following chapters we shall find out . . .

But do not despair. The book is not all bad. It has some good. It has a glossary and a biographical dictionary. These are useful.

If, as seems probable, it should go into paperback, any price up to 50¢ would be reasonable for the sake of the appendices.

—JUDITH MERRIL

EDITOR'S NOTE

Reader reaction on the book review column is always welcome and often influential. In her last two columns Miss Merril has written an essay in depth on three books only (May 1965), and (*above*) has commented more concisely on a greater number of books. Which do you prefer? Any other comments . . . suggestions? Address: Book Review Editor, Fantasy & Science Fiction, 347 E. 53 St., New York, N. Y. 10022.

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Our favorite stand-up comic, Woody Allen, tells about the escape of a dozen chain-gang prisoners who slip past the guards by posing as an immense charm bracelet. For some truly startling effects of a similar nature, you will want to start immediately this further (CHAMELEON, Sept. 1964) adventure of Ben Jolson of the Chameleon Corps.

RAKE

by Ron Goulart

THE LUNGED STUN ROD MISSED and tipped over the barmaid. Beer suds washed across the nearwood flooring and the android barmaid slithered on its back, sputtering.

On top of the long dining table Ben Jolson spun and jumped again. Two of the Monitors circled the table, both lunging. The black attache case locked to his wrist made Jolson slightly lopsided and he didn't quite land as he'd planned. He hunkered and one of the grey cloaked Monitors sailed over him and clattered into the deep simulated fireplace.

That left only three of Dean Riding's men to dodge. The few patrons of the little tavern near the space port had huddled against the small bar. All the thumping had done something to the andy bartender and he kept drawing tankards of green ale and setting them up. Jolson spotted a stairway and ran for it. He had to leap up first, to avoid one stun rod and then hunch almost into the wall to avoid another.

Blocking a blow with his attache case Jolson backed up the curving staircase. "You guys better quit now or it gives trouble."

"Surrender, Waycross," said a Monitor. "This isn't doing your academic standing any good."

"Down with the Unyoke Movement," shouted the second Monitor, pressing upward toward Jolson.

"You mentioned that before," Jolson said, getting out of the way of another blow. "I'm warning you. Go away and don't bother me."

"You went too far this time, Waycross," said the first Monitor. "This summons from the Dean's office is not to be ignored." He almost got Jonson's foot.

Jolson put his fingers on the

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snap of the attache case and said, "Remember. You wouldn't listen." He started to open it.

A little over a day before Ben Jolson of the Chameleon Corps had arrived here on the planet Taragon. He'd been sent on a special mission by the Political Espionage Office on Barnum, the planet that ruled all the planets in the Barnum System.

Step one had been a rendezvous, in his own person, at a coffee and gaming house near sprawling, pseudo-ivied Taragon University.

The windows of the low ceilinged smoke-blurred coffee house were leaded shards of bottle glass. Fragmented blotches of colored afternoon sunlight filled the place. Jolson, loosening the coat seam on his bland civilian suit, moved through the clutter of students toward booth 8.

Tankards clicked all around. The ivory counters of Venusian bingo clacked from a curtain hidden back room. The word *Unyoke* blocked Jolson's progress. It was on a placard, the first of a line of six that had just been raised by a group of students.

There had been trouble at Taragon University for several weeks now. The Student Unyoke Movement was demanding concessions from Dean Riding. Jolson had been sleep briefed on all that but it was not a major concern of his.

Horses were heard approaching and the signs dropped. Jolson worked his way foreward. The horsemen passed and the signs came up. The student he was meeting was not involved with Unyoke, or with much of anything academic. He was the mostly hell-raising son of a Barnum ambassador named Waycross. His father called him a rake and a profligate. So did the Political Espionage Office. They had a use for young Waycross. Jolson was going to impersonate him for the next twenty four hours.

Unyoke Immediately! the sign that masked booth 8 read. Jolson pushed it aside and found Miguel Waycross holding its stick. "You, Waycross?"

Waycross was about twenty, taller and leaner than Jolson. He wore his dark hair short with the exaggerated widow's peak most of the Taragon men students seemed to favor. "Well," said the student, apparently recognizing Jolson from the briefing PEO's agent had given him, "I've had a change of heart, sir."

"Oh, so?" Jolson eyed the plump young man who was sitting across from Waycross stirring a jar of paint with a brush tip.

"This is Stu Marks," said Miguel Waycross. "He's been my best and closest friend since a week ago Monday."

"You mean," said Jolson, easing onto the bench next to him, "you've joined the Unyoke Movement."

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"Yes," said Waycross, with an eyes down grin. "I know you were expecting nothing but a rakehell, sir. I'm dedicated and motivated now."

"A cause," pointed out Marks, "does that for you." His widow's peak wasn't affixed properly and it snapped up. He slapped it back in place.

Jolson narrowed his eyes, turned again to Waycross. "So now?"

"Stu," said Waycross. "Let me talk to this guy alone."

"Okay." Marks rose. To Jolson he said, "That's the first conservative suit I've seen that I've liked in a long time." His own outfit was orange, fringed with green.

After Marks had been sucked into the crowd Waycross said, "It's like being reborn, Lt. Jolson. I'm really up to here in worthwhile activity."

"Don't tell me you're even attending classes?"

"No time for that," said Waycross. "Listen, Lt. Jolson, I'm still willing to co-operate with PEO. Afterall, I owe it to my dad. I have some speeches to write. See, Walter R. Scamper himself, the grand old man of all the Unyoke Movements is arriving at the space port tomorrow night. I've been picked to make the welcoming speech." He grinned and then let it fade. "You will be finished with my identity by then?"

"Yes," said Jolson.

"Good. Then I'll hole up at a place I know and write away. Meanwhile my identity will ease your access to the campus. Okay?"

"I'll go there with you and you can fill me in on the small details of the set up at Taragon University."

Waycross nodded. "You're seeing Professor Nibblett two hours from now, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Jolson. "How'd you know that?"

"Oh, what with dad's reputation. Your POE man told me most everything." He studied Jolson. "You must be over thirty."

"Thirty-two."

"Yet you can change yourself right into an exact replica of me."

It had taken the Chameleon Corps twelve years to condition him for this kind of job. "With no trouble."

"I guess you're proud."

Jolson, when CC didn't call on him for urgent assignments, ran a wholesale pottery business. "Let's go, huh?" He eased out of the booth.

More hoofbeats sounded. This time the mounts drew up outside the coffee house.

"Oops," said Waycross. "Dean Riding's Monitors are making a checkup. Come on." He guided Jolson toward the gaming rooms. "Back way."

In a moment Jolson and Waycross and some twenty student agitators and gamesters were running down a yellow brick alley.

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The espionage people hadn't briefed Jolson about any of this.

The permanent autumn leaves were programmed to drift down when the campanile struck the hour. Jolson ducked to avoid a big one and turned down a gravel path that led toward the Science Complex. He was now an exact physical duplicate of Miguel Waycross, wearing a borrowed lemon yellow coat and sky blue ruffle-ankled pants.

The Political Espionage Office, and they ran CC, felt it would be more efficient if Professor Nibblett were contacted by someone in the guise of a student. Waycross' father had probably sat in on either a planning or a preplanning conference. Jolson, as an artificial breeze fluttered his ankles, yearned for the pottery business. Once the Chamelon Corps got you, though, you were always on call.

"Ah ha," shouted a sharp nasal voice.

Jolson halted and turned. This stretch of path was passing through a grove of real trees. Over on a rococo iron work bench a middle-aged man, long and lank, was sneering at him. "Sir?" said Jolson.

The man, whose straight black hair was parted in the middle, fluffed his moustache. "You ignored my summons for a chat, Waycross." From the bench he picked up a pair of spiked gloves. "I must say I liked you better when you were a harmless drunken sot and hellbent rake."

The gloves flew at Jolson and he stepped aside, letting them clatter on the gravel. "Could we make another appointment, sir?"

"An appointment missed allows me other recourse," said the man. He was tugging on spiked gloves of his own. "You know the rules of the Dean's office. First a summons, then a reprimand, then the field of honor."

Yes, Waycross was looking more and more like an unwise selection. "Oh, really?" Jolson dropped to one knee and picked up the gloves. "Well, okay, sir." This was obviously Dean Riding.

Riding had his gloves on and he went into a crouch. "Let us proceed, Waycross. I'm burning for satisfaction." He skittered across the synthetic grass and landed one footed in front of Jolson.

"Isn't this really an ideological conflict?" said Jolson. The second glove was not going on right. His thumb kept slipping into the middle finger slot.

Dean Riding snarled and feinted with a mailed left. "I refuse to upgrade the Unyoke Movement by calling it ideological." He jabbed a right into Jolson's stomach.

"Oof," said Jolson, bicycling.

"Set up card tables on faculty grounds, will you?" cried the Dean,

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slashing Jolson's cheek. "Hand out leaflets during lectures." Another cut. "Demand equal time on the educational channel. I'll teach you there's no equality around here, upstart."

"Well," said Jolson, not liking to bleed. He suddenly caused himself to shrink several inches. This threw Dean Riding's next swing off. Then Jolson sidestepped and elongated his right arm to about triple its length. He snapped it out like a whip and let it wind and tighten around the Dean's throat. The mailed fist slammed into Riding's temple at the end of its spin. Riding collapsed. Jolson unwound his arm and retracted it, started running.

A few students had come up during the fight's final phase. They applauded now, then scattered.

Professor Nibblett's round ringed eyes squinted behind the Judas hole in the lab door. "I'd feel safer with a password," he said. His voice was throaty, breaking occasionally into a falsetto.

"Liberte, egalite, fraternite," said Jolson. "Is that okay?" PEO hadn't given him any passwords or numbers on this assignment. "I think the Dean may be after me. May I come in?"

The window shut and the blue door slid open. "I shouldn't ask for passwords, should I?" said Nibblett. He was a medium sized man with curly grey hair and a rounded stomach. "Afterall, the keynote of the Nibblett Project is doing things right out in the open. So that antiBarnum forces won't wonder about any hush-hush. Come in. Political Espionage wanted to call my work Project Upgrade or Taragon Doomsday but I insisted on simply the Nibblett Project. I like to see my name on things. Your name again?"

"Ben Jolson," he said, following the professor across a large empty class room. The door slid shut behind them.

"That over there," said the professor, "is an oldfashioned blackboard. I write assignments on it with something they used to call chalk." He moved through the shadowy clusters of chairs to the big blackboard and picked up two erasers. Slamming them against two preselected spots he said, "Watch now."

The blackboard quivered and then rolled away. There was a corridor behind it.

"Step over the eraser trough," said Nibblett, doing that.

Beyond the corridor was a door locked with a ten finger whorl lock. Beyond that a small laboratory.

When they were shut in the professor said, "Now then. I have most of them at my home to be packed. You will pick them up there tomorrow evening at five. Is that allright?"

His ship didn't leave till ten. "Yes."

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"You'll come as Waycross."

"About that," said Jolson. "Waycross' status seems to have changed in the past week." He told Nibblett about Unyoke and Dean Riding's attack.

"I never involve myself in politics, on a student level," said the professor. "However, I'm too busy to think about new faces. I'm conditioned to your being Waycross. Please don't cross me up at this stage. Be Waycross, come at five tomorrow. You know my home address?"

"They briefed me, yes."

Behind a small blackboard there was a wall safe. "I like hiding things behind these old blackboards," said Professor Nibblett. "I've kept a sample of them here." He drew a small transparent container out of the safe. It looked like something potato salad had come in. "It elates me that I'll soon be fondly referred to as the father of upgraded germ warfare."

"And your wife will become the mother of upgraded germ warfare."

"No, I'll take all the credit," said Nibblett, unliding the container. "Watch how they work. Oh, wait. I need a rabbit. Hand me one. From those cribs there."

Jolson selected a piebald one. "Do you have to kill him? I'll take your word."

"A demonstration's not a demonstration without it," explained the professor. "We kill a rabbit now, but in the long run we save millions of lives."

"Pro-Barnum lives."

"That's the side we happen to be on." Nibblett caught the rabbit by the ears and dropped it on a black topped table. The open container stayed on a white metal table several feet away. "Watch now. Attention. Forward march."

Little black dots began pouring over the lip of the container. They marched in pairs down the leg of the white table.

"Attack the rabbit," ordered Nibblett, clapping his hands.

The dots trooped across the buff flooring and up the leg of the black topped table. The rabbit hopped to the edge. Then shot off and into a corner of the room. Calmly the little dots marched down to the table and then broke into two flanks and surrounded the agitated rabbit.

"Charge," cried Nibblett.

The dots surged ahead, swarmed over the spotted animal. The rabbit cried out once, then toppled back. In under thirty seconds it was dead and glowing faintly green.

"Retreat to your container," ordered the smiling professor. When the giant germs had marched home he closed them in and put the container again in the wall safe. "That's how they work."

"Intelligent germs?" said Jolson.

"Smart enough to drill, do the manual of arms if need be and

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carry out simple commands. They can't be counteracted in any way at the moment." He paused and his head bobbed. "Warfare takes a step ahead today. Or rather four and a half weeks ago when my six years of work culminated in success."

Jolson moved so he wouldn't have to look at the dead rabbit. "How do I transport them back to Barnum?"

"They like to go on trips. I'll deliver you six containers of them tomorrow and verbally give you instructions to pass on to PEO." He shrugged and lines jiggled under his eyes. "You can carry them in an attache case."

"Will they obey me?"

"They are conditioned to obey any Pro-Barnum authority."

"They can tell who's pro and who's anti?"

"Loyalty wasn't that hard a thing to program into them."

Jolson left in a few moments. He had to remain Waycross in the corridors of the lab complex because a heavy set wide young professor was looking at him funny and took to following him through two levels.

When Jolson had shook free of the possible tail he put his hands up to his face and changed to a less controversial face than Waycross'.

Nobody was supposed to know Jolson was staying at the Urban Manor hotel, which made the visit of Professor Gurney Tishamingo the next day unsettling from the start.

Tishamingo, who was the big wide guy who'd eyed Jolson yesterday in the Science Complex, showed up at the door a half hour before Jolson was to leave for Nibblett's home.

Jolson was using his own appearance now but it still upset him to have Tishamingo open with, "Ben Jolson?"

"Who are you?" Jolson asked, not moving away from the door.

"I'm with the University. Professor Gurney Tishamingo, Department of Agricultural Psychiatry."

"All our plants are in good mental health." Jolson began to close the door.

"It's about the Nibblett Project," Tishamingo whispered.

There was a growing lack of security on this mission. "Yes?"

"Inside I'll explain."

Jolson let the big man in and made the mistake of turning his back for an instant. His view from the glass wall of the room was dotted with stars of pain. Gurney Tishamingo had jabbed a needle into his left buttock. "Some explanation," said Jolson, toppling over. He was paralyzed now, going rigid.

"Nothing permanent," said the professor. "You Chamelon Corps boys are tricky. That shot'll keep

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you as is for several hours. Long enough for us to get the stuff from old Nibblett."

Jolson couldn't respond.

The wide Tishamingo hoisted him up on the bed. "No use tying you. You CC boys can slither out of bonds like snakes." He punched Jolson's shoulder in a comradely fashion. "I notice that puzzled expression frozen on your face. Never trust those Political Espionage boys for current reports on the lay of the political land. What you don't know, Jolson, is that today Ambassador Waycross has bolted and gone over to the Anti-Barnum side. The side I'm on. This whole thing with his son was a set up so we, the Anti-Barnum boys, could get those smart little germs with a minimum of trouble."

It had long ago seemed like too much trouble to Jolson.

Mounted police were galloping toward the spaceport. It was after eight now, a sharp chill night.

Jolson was still a little stiff in the joints. He'd confirmed the snatch. Professor Nibblett had handed over the germs to the real Waycross, thinking he was Jolson, promptly at five.

If young Waycross was really going to welcome Walter R. Scamper at the space port there might be a chance to catch him and get the germs back.

The paralyzing drug hadn't knocked him out for as long as Tishamingo had intended. Jolson's system, after all the years the Chameleon Corps had worked on it, tended to be unpredictable like that.

A makeshift platform stood near the dome shaped restaurant closest to the gate. Three hundred or so bright clad students were circled around it already. Against the night Jolson saw that the ship that must have brought Walter R. Scamper was unloading its passengers.

Just climbing up on the simulated wood platform was Miguel Waycross, in a formal orange pullover and buff knickers.

Jolson was tired of round about action. He ducked into a thick clump of decorative brush.

"We have the right," Waycross' amplified voice was saying, "to put up card tables wherever we choose. Academic life isn't all studies and duels. No."

Jolson shucked his clothes, shook himself once and turned into a gigantic black eagle. He flapped up into the night. He rose high and circled.

"There is nothing as important," continued Waycross, "as the right to hand out leaflets. Right?"

Jolson swooped and caught up Waycross in his talons. He flew to a more remote gathering of trees and shrubs back of the space port and dropped Waycross from a height sufficient to stun him.

He landed next to the groggy

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student and changed back to himself. He took Waycross' clothes and put them on.

Waycross woke up, shivered, and said, "I thought you Chameleon Corps guys were in favor of free speech."

"I'm against spies and guys who give me unsolicited shots in the ass," said Jolson. "Where are the damn germs?"

"No," said Waycross.

"I'll drop you again. From higher up."

"When you put it that way," said Waycross. "My friend Marks has the stuff. He's waiting near here, at the Cock 'N Bull Tavern. I was going to take a flight out at ten. But I had to welcome old Walter R. Scamper." He frowned. "You spoiled that pretty well."

"Sure," said Jolson. He knocked Waycross out with a right to the chin and rolled him under a row of yellow rose bushes. He shook his head and changed his appearance. As Waycross again he headed for the Cock 'N Bull.

He found Stu Marks well enough and got the attache case. The black case even had a handcuff set up and Jolson decided to hook it to his wrist. As he was stepping out of the tavern four of Dean Riding's mounted Monitors reined up in front of the place.

"Not at the rally, eh, Waycross?" cried one, drawing a sword-like stun rod.

Jolson swore and dived back into the tavern.

So now he was half way up the stairs. "I'd advise you guys to back off," he told the Monitors. "The only weapon I've got is unfortunately pretty deadly." He hesitated. Turned and ran on upstairs. He ducked into a half open door, hoping they wouldn't make him use the trained germs.

Jolson crossed the half empty store room and shoved up a window. He put the attache case handle in his mouth and jumped out on a slanted roof. Behind him three Monitors dived into the store room.

He catwalked a gable and ducked behind a chimney. He got the student outfit off and switched back to the eagle. The handcuff slipped off his wing tip but he had the case in his big beak. He rose up before the first Monitor reached the chimney.

Back at the spaceport the rally had turned into a riot. Jolson retrieved his clothes from behind the brush and, becoming himself, quickly clicked the germ case to his wrist.

In his coat pocket was a ticket on the ten o'clock flight to Barnum. He used it.

Because of the trouble the ship took off a half hour late. In the cocktail lounge after the space ship had risen a thin freckled man next to Jolson at the small bar put down his glass and asked, "What

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do you think about this student Unyoke Movement?"

Jolson shifted the case of germs to a more comfortable position on his lap. "Hell," he said. "I never think anymore."

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PHOENIX

by Theodore L. Thomas

A CAREFUL LOOK AT THE PLANets Jupiter and Saturn has turned up some interesting possibilities. For instance, the composition of Jupiter is such that the temperature at the base of its atmosphere may be a red-hot 2,000 degrees Kelvin instead of the deep-freeze temperature usually assumed. Explanations of the features of Jupiter and Saturn may be of help in explaining the origin of the solar system itself.

The sun and the planets probably condensed from a cloud of dust and gas. The cloud contained about 2 percent heavy elements, about 20 percent helium, the rest hydrogen. Just how the cloud condensed to form the sun and planets is not yet known.

Evidence is increasing that the giant planets are really very much like the sun, save for size. When the mean density of Earth is taken to be one, that of Jupiter is 0.24, and that of the sun is 0.25. It now appears that Jupiter is made up mostly of huge amounts of hydrogen along with the usual helium, and some ammonia and methane. The only factor that keeps Jupiter from behaving like the sun is that its mass isn't great enough to initiate internal nuclear reactions.

A recent estimate of Jupiter's composition calls for ammonia, ice, and water in the topmost cloud layers. Deeper, there is liquid hydrogen, then solid hydrogen, then metallic hydrogen. And at the core are the rocky silicates and metallic elements. That core may prove interesting.

Although it has been suggested that heat from the sun has boiled away the hydrogen atmospheres of the close, inner planets, it apparently has not been suggested that all the planets are substantially alike at their cores. It may not be due to accident that Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars are much the same size. Most of their volatiles and some of their solids have been distilled away. The blaze of heat from the early sun may have been insufficient to reach Jupiter and those beyond, and may have been just right to shatter by thermal shock the planet that once lay between Mars and Jupiter.

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The original, condensing dust cloud may have coaleseed symmetrically after all, producing eight planets of essentially the same size, Pluto probably being a runaway satellite. The sun's heat boiled away the volatiles on the near, inner planets.

Take a Jupiter, bathe it in fire, and you get an Earth.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Reader comment on The Science Springboard series is welcomed. Criticism and suggestions regarding topics, length, approach, etc., may be sent to Mr. Thomas c/o F&SF, 347 East 53 St., New York, N. Y. 10022

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SHORT-STORY CONTEST WINNERS

Introduction

Herb Lehrman, first, and Greg Benford, second, win prizes and publication in F&SF's contest (Dec. 1964) for the best short story based on *From Two Universes*, a poem which noted that no narrative I had seen combined the Univac and the Unicorn. Though the ingredients of the two prize-winning selections were pre-set, treatments differ delightfully; one tragic-emotional, one witty-naughty. The emerald pastures where Mr. Lehrman places a machine not meant for dreaming enhance our pleasure in Mr. Benford's environment, which is rapidly turning into myth, open house parties and all. The giddy and knowing dialogue involving a very feminine unicorn not averse to a pick-up, contrasts with the bitter lamentation of a mighty stallion on the death of lovers. My own simple statement has been carried into major themes while the world of the Unicorn is taken on its own basis or, conversely, the unrealities of maddest fantasy invade a San Francisco walk-up. Both authors have the ability to make a reader suspend his disbelief while a proto-computer takes center stage with unforseen results. It sets the reader wondering what might happen if a matador like the late Manolete found himself facing a winged bull of Assyria. Where will we be if mermaids, whose adventures with submarine volcanoes are unrecorded, demand Red Cross help for disaster areas? Puck—we know from an informed source—girdled the earth in slightly over half an hour; suppose Puck deviled the latest Tiros into orbit racing. But back to the contest: Purely technically both authors have achieved *tours de force* in condensing so much into 1000 words each—paradox, irony, prophetic vision, destruction and salvation. This is quite a feat whether or not we relish what is saved. This contest, open only to non-professionals, suggests the pleasure in store for the rest of us when Mr. Lehrman and Mr. Benford really begin to sell. Meawhile turn to their highly individual confrontations of Univac and Unicorn.

—Doris Pitkin Buck

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THE ANCIENT LAST

by Herb Lehrman

HE WAS THE LAST OF HIS LINE and they put him out to pasture in an emerald field where the youngers, streamlined and genetically sleek, could come to watch and know what real power was. It was there all right, muscles rippling beneath massive shoulders. And that solid, proud, Oh! so-proud, head with the twisted horn that reached for the sky; scarred, cracked with age, blunted by time and battle, it was still a thing of magic in a universe of wonder.

He cantered there on the green; the last of the great Unicorns and ran across the turf to show there was still spring in his legs and power in that deep milky chest. And tiring on occasion, with the weariness immortals sometimes feel, he would sit and remember the maidens, the wishes fulfilled and an age when his name was a clarion of virility.

Near the ancient fields of his universe, a little to the right of where he slept, the young bucks, stalwarts all, during the blackness of one long night left a thing to mock him. It was a machine, rusted and broken, its circuits no longer what they had been. A castaway from the Universe of man, which somehow had come into this world of magic to lay in the center of the field. It was a cruel snub, a reminder he too was old and like the machine near useless.

"What are you?" asked the ancient greybeard, overcome with the curiosity that had borne him through the ages. "Who are you to defile my sanctuary?"

"Yak, Yak, that's a busted Univac." The young bucks sneered in unison, thumbing their golden horn-nubs at the old one's stupidity.

He tossed his head and made as if to rush them. His rheumy old eyes flashed fire and that gray blunt horn lowered, whistling in the cold blue air. And they ran before the power, the force still there.

He turned then, cantering proudly back to the machine. "I too know what it means to be discarded. Cast away! . . . I'll show them there's stuff still left in both of us." And having known all the knowledge of man, having bent his shoulders before a millennia of wishes the old Unicorn

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set to, to make the Univac whole again.

He labored day. He labored night, changing a wire here, weaving a gold strand there, commanding a crystal to warp, a relay to snap. But for all his craft and work and sweat—no matter how he made it gleam and hiss the fact was plain. The Univac was a dolt, a lesser thing of logic which could not conceive of beauty.

"The trouble is, you have no heart," the old Unicorn said one day, tiring of asking his new friend questions to which he already knew the answers. "You have no juice, no loins to feel the power of life."

"There is beauty in the perfection of logic, in an equation with balance, in a question answered," replied the machine, using his new gift of speech laboriously. "Of this other thing, of this I know nothing, being only a machine."

"Live then," the old one said making his voice magic. "Live then and know what means the slow cloud a man can bring to a woman's eye, the feel of rain, the thrill of battles won."

Alas, no magic, no spell could breach the ranks of solid-state devices, and the machine stood mutely, devoid of desire. "What is it you wish?" it said finally. "What do you want of me? A memory? A dream? I have the first but the second lives in a different realm, forever hidden, denied to me."

"Ah, it is a sad thing then. For memory is not enough. It's the dream which counts. The dream that one is still young, still beautiful, still filled with life."

"It must be wonderful," said Univac. "I wish I could dream with you my dearest friend." And with a sudden surge of never-before-felt current its circuits all overloaded and it melted into a pile of slag.

The oldest Unicorn first grew *old* then; his horn became heavy, his neck bowed and the youngers no longer came to mock him. Instead they came to revere him, to pay homage to his cracked voice, his senile wisdom. Finally one day as the old one lay warming his sore withers in the sun the strongest of the young came upon him. "Old one," he said, "tell me, did the machine die of stupidity?"

"No," was the answer. "It died of something only the very old, the discarded die of. The very thing which will some day claim you and claim me when even I grow too old to bear the pain and the burden of my memories."

"What is that?" said the younger.

"You gambol with the maidens and give it a name," said the old one. "But what I call by that name is something else again." And seeing the brightness burning in the younger; feeling the budding-hold vigor and strong life, he knew he too must finally give way.

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The smaller golden beast sat silent. He knew truth when he faced it, and there in the twilight of an emerald field he came to manhood, wiser than most. So wise indeed, he did not need to hear the old one's final, almost bitter words. "Like I, it died of love."

HERB LEHRMAN *writes that he has a BA plus a couple of years at a middle-western grad school "where I discovered that the eggcream is not a universal drink and that ice in a plain chocolate soda can make you gag. Am a young 35, single (but still with ambitions) and have a variety of interests not the least of which is trailing a surf rod up and down Long Island beaches in search of the sometimes elusive striped bass."*

STAND-IN

by Greg Benford

WHEN I GOT TO THE PARTY THE unicorn was talking to a girl in ballet tights and the liquor was already gone.

Never throw an open house party in San Francisco. It's a town full of people who like to drink and talk talk talk, and the only ones that give parties are masochists who like trampled rugs and depleted refrigerators.

Not that I'm not one of them. I'm a man who likes people, work, responsibility, the whole bit. That's why I put on parties every once in a while—without a few of us the social life of the city would fall apart. Occasionally I think it's people like me who carry the world on their shoulders.

The girl went away with an undiscovered poet and there was a bearded character giving a political harange in the corner, so I talked to the one in costume.

"Pretty nice," I said, trying to look down its throat and see who was inside. Are unicorns supposed to have tonsils? This one did.

"Thank you," she said. A husky, deep voice. "I have it brushed twice a day."

"What?"

"My coat, of course, silly." She gave a demure little whinny, undeniably feminine. For the first time I noticed that the coat was a soft, warm gold, only slightly lighter than the funny little horn in the middle of her forehead.

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"You mean this isn't a costume? Your coat is real?"

As it developed, not only was she a unicorn, and real, but a good conversationalist, too. I won't make the obvious remark about the people you meet at parties—my motto is just accept everything, don't try to figure out the situation, and see what develops. Still, unicorns don't turn up every day.

"I thought you were extinct."

"Oh no," she batted golden eyelashes at me. "Technically, we never existed, so we couldn't become extinct."

"Then how . . .?"

"It's one of those proverbial long stories. If you have the time . . ."

A hint, of course, almost classic in its form. I never thought I'd get one from something that looked literally like a horse, though.

I looked around. A lot of new and old faces were mingling with each other, with the standard party types. The Quarreling Couple were trying not to make a scene, there was the Symbolic Negro and The Girl Who'll Have Hysterics Later. And as I said, no drinks. Nothing particularly to hold me.

"Yours or mine?"

Hers was an ordinary walk-up with a few tacked-on pretensions. The smell of money hung over the interior, though, and I had to wade through inch-thick rugs to reach the couch.

"It's a matter of necessity," she said, settling into a strange hammock-like affair of cloth and wrought iron.

"Human beings are always thinking up things they can't have, or think exist somewhere else. It's a habit they have, although I must say I don't quite understand it. Seems like a waste of time."

I looked at a carefully manicured hoof and tried to pay attention.

"So you draw us in. From alternate universes, I suppose you would say, although it's not exactly that. Once we're here we can't get out. Your race doesn't understand what it's doing, but there's no way we can stop you."

" 'We?' "

"Oh, I'm not really like this," she gestured at the glistening golden body. "It's the form I'm forced to take. By this."

She pressed a button on a side table and the wall at the other end of the room slid aside. It was one long panel of dully blinking lights and spinning magnetic tapes. A worn panel near the top had the name UNIVAC almost scratched out.

"UNIVAC? That was dismantled long ago."

"True. We have to make do with what we can, and some of the old parts are easier to get. It's more than a computer—it synthesizes the chemicals I live on, keeps this body functioning and gives

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me my instructions. I'm just in training now, before I work."

"But why?"

"Because you and your vivid imaginations—the worst in the galaxy—have drawn us all into your fantasies, right out of our own lives. The emotional pull is too strong, so we have to go along. It's a strain, though, and my people don't last very long. There have been four unicorns before me, and we've had dozens of those Norse Gods—they're terrible on one's health, with all that throwing lightning around. Even a comparatively civilized character, like Sherlock Holmes and his morphine, can wear us down."

The machine must have been listening, because it clattered its tapes eagerly in agreement.

"So that's why I wanted to talk to you. We've never been very healthy, and there aren't many of us left."

"Yes," the machine droned into the conversation, "there are a number of vacancies."

"And our people—we have a compulsion, we must complete these legends of yours. Do you understand?"

I nodded.

"Little Orphan Annie is open," UNIVAC said. "Beowulf needs replacement. King Lear, James Bond, Hegel's Absolute Will . . ."

"And Atlas," she said.

So you can see how I got this job.

Like I said, I'm one of those people who carry the world on their shoulders.

GREG BENFORD *has been active in amateur journalism of one sort or another for some time, has lived in various regions of the world and enjoyed them all. He is 24 years old, and is currently studying for his PhD (in Physics) at the University of California, San Diego.*

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Doris Buck herewith offers an excellent science-fictional demonstration that "Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned, / Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned."

STORY OF A CURSE

by Doris Pitkin Buck

"BUT YOU CANNOT LEAVE ME. You swore, you swore, you swore —" Malia was on the verge of tears as she clutched the child to her. The child's earthborn, earth-bred father had never seen her weep, not even in the pains of labor. He patted her shoulder in what he meant to be kindliness.

Malia controlled herself. "Lord, you have taught me the legends of your planet. That is a tie almost as sacred as our child. I would not have listened had I not thought of you as my husband."

"Oh come, come," he said. "You were as eager in the *laliac* cave as I was. I never saw anybody freer."

She knelt at his feet, their son in the bend of her arm. "But Lord, had I been different, how could you have known our marriage would be fertile?"

"Well, if that's the custom here, that's the custom. You'll find all kinds of customs if space ships land from other planets."

"But you swore, by our gods and by the gods of earth, to stay with me forever. Yet now you make ready to go. You meant nothing."

"Look, Malia, I meant every word while I said them. But a mood doesn't last forever. And I never swore by the gods of earth, because we don't have any. My men and I are in tune with earth, more than most. We think of her as our mother, but not like a special goddess. We know she's matter—organic and inorganic. She'll draw us back because —" He broke off. "I can't explain, not to a savage."

"But my lord, in some way I must have failed you."

"No. No. You're a nice enough girl." Suddenly he looked at her quite seriously. "You mean that's what people, the elders, your family—that's what they'll think; that you failed me?"

She nodded in tears. She kissed his hand and the child's hand, which was like his, not hers. She clung to him, pleading mutely.

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"I wish I could take you with me. I do wish it. But it's not possible. Everything on the ship is designed for twelve men. You'd kill my crew, breathing their air, eating their food—Oh, I don't have to go on. Even you can see."

"Lord, lord —"

"There isn't any use in . . . this. I ought not to have come back for a goodbye. But you were somebody a bit special, and —"

She had sprung to her feet, her hot tears turning to hotter anger. "But why, father of my child? Why —"

"Because I'm from earth and everyone from earth must have change. It's that simple."

She looked her bewilderment.

"But Malia, the crew and I, we aren't the same. Time brings changes. You can count on that." He began to speak uneasily because she frightened him, the way she echoed his words silently with her lips and made motions with her fingers. "Change is part of our rhythm."

Her mouth still moved. He let her have it.

"I'm fed up—do you understand what I mean when I say I'm fed up? I'm tired of the fruits that are always ripe, and the lakes that are never chilly and never rough. Just for half an hour, I'd like a breeze that isn't perfumed. My men feel the way I do. So we're on to the next planet, even though we know it won't be as lovely as our own changeful earth. That's the way earth is. That's the way we are."

He spun on his heel.

He did not even see her stare with altered eyes at the bastard, while she mouthed what its father said.

The spaceship found a planet covered with traces of an ice age, but now temperate. The shy girls were like earthgirls except for their gold-green hair that had the perfume of drying hay. It pleased all the voyagers, especially their captain, who had memories to drown, but the changefulness in their earth-nourished blood drove them on.

They found planets that were flame and steam, like earth in its younger days. They found planets that were gutted tombs. Some worlds had nothing but plains and wild plain-creatures, which they caught and rode, till a longing for mountains such as the ranges of earth drove them on once more. They sailed in archipelagos where the shores were green with forests like tourmalines, and all the beaches were strewn with agate. But one green archipelago can be very like another; and they remembered that earth had her Indies, and her arctic seas with islands that never grew warm. They remembered wave-circled peaks of rock; and bars of sand, some of one hue, some of another.

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Then the captain heard murmurs. His men yearned for their mother, who was fair as everything they had seen, but had many a fairness more.

His crew sighed a little, for they knew that the laws of time for voyagers were different from the laws of time on one rotating body. They were older than when they had left their system, but they were still strong men. On earth their sweethearts would be—They were not sure. Dead perhaps. No man can have everything, and they had wandered their fill.

They came at last to their own system, where it was well to go more slowly. They passed dark Pluto and saw the sun as a faint point of light, without warmth. They knew Saturn by its rings. On Jupiter the red spot was larger and glowed more vividly; they thought they made out incandescent cliffs that might or might not have been there before. They could not be sure, for a massive atmosphere is full of tricks. They skirted the asteroids and Mars.

Earth greeted them, shining like a star. They sang as they came near their mother, who had formed them as they were. Had they been religious, they would have prayed.

"If I were a woman," the captain said, "you'd see me in tears. But I am stronger than any woman."

They answered that they all were.

Each hour seemed unending while they disposed of the rations they would no longer need. Their instruments had grown decrepit; but soon they would have no use for them, and from long practice they could make planet-landing as sailors go through surf to a shore. The lenses of their viewing instruments were fogged and all but useless. This made some angry, for they yearned to see the varied earth, but their captain told them she would be all the more glorious when she burst on their sight, close at hand.

They came down in their tender and the men groaned with disappointment, for they hovered over an inhospitable region of rock and worn-down hills, scarred with cracks and furrows. By the captain's reckoning those hills should have been the snowpeaks and forested slopes of the Himalayas. He frowned, then ordered their course set along a great circle.

Presently one man said, "Where is the sea?"

Slowly it came to them that the oceans of earth were dry. Age was upon their mother's body as it must have been for many a year while they wandered. She had no life-giving scarf of atmosphere. She was merely a desert of rock and dust, like her still circling moon.

The captain cursed. Tears

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streamed down his cheeks, for he had counted on the unending cycles of his earth-mother. Sometimes he half remembered a different planet. But someone blocked him before he could hear a man say: *Time brings changes. You can count on that.*

NABONIDUS

While grubbing in the sand at Tell es-Sa'id
I met a ghost, in antique raiment clad,
Who said: "How goes the dig, my foreign friend?
I, too, dug here when I in flesh was penned,
For relics, though my courtiers thought me mad—
A king was I; my name was Nabuna'id.

"Last suzerain of Babylon was I,
The ruler of the wide world's greatest town,
Where merchants cried their wares in voices shrill,
And learned seers nightly sought the will
Of gods—till Persian Cyrus trod us down—
From ziggurats that pierced the starry sky.

"Behind its mighty, moated, triple wall
And Ishtar's azure, dragon-guarded gate,
My city seethed with men of every kind:
With lord and lady, hawker, harlot, hind,
With potter, priest, and officer of state,
With smith and soldier, boxer, thief, and thrall.

"And now they're dust, as are the stately fanes
Of Bab-ilû, for so the stars decreed;
And scattered are the contents of my crypt
Of written bricks, in Sumer's ancient script.
But tell me, man with trousers like a Mede,
In your far distant day, if, spurning gains

"Of yellow gold, soft flesh, and power fell,
A man seek knowledge, do they still make game
Of him and cry: 'O fool'?" "Sometimes," I said.
"I thought as much." The phantom of the dead
Dissolved in dust. His parting sigh became
The desert breeze that whispered round the tell.

—L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

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FUTURE? TENSE!

by Isaac Asimov

ON THE WHOLE, THERE ARE two ways of looking at a science-fiction writer.

One way is to consider him a nut. ("How are the little green men these days, Isaac?" "Been to the Moon lately, Ike, old boy?")

The other way is to consider him a keen-eyed viewer of the future. ("And what will the vacuum cleaner of the 21st Century be like, Dr. Asimov?" "What sort of thing will be replacing television, Professor?")

Of the two, I suppose I prefer the former. It is, after all, quite easy to be a nut. I can do it on short notice anytime and anywhere, from faculty teas to science fiction conventions.

Predicting the future is a great deal more difficult, particularly on the terms usually set by those questioning you. What the questioners are invariably interested in are precise gadgetary details and that is exactly what I cannot give them.

You can well imagine, then, that when asked to address a sedate group, or write an article for a particularly staid periodical, the subject I least like to discuss is "The Future as I See it."

You can also well imagine that the subject I am asked to discuss, almost invariably, is—all right, you guessed it.

So I refuse! At least, I *usually* refuse. Unfortunately, although I am staunch and gimlet-eyed in my convictions and would far sooner die than compromise my principles, I have a weak point. I'm just an eentsy-weentsy bit susceptible to flattery.

Consequently, when the *New York Times* called, shortly after the New York World's Fair opened, and asked that I visit the Fair at their expense and write an article for them on what the world would be like fifty years or so in the future, I hesitated some, then agreed.

After all, I intended to visit the Fair anyway, and I expected to have

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a howling good time (and I *did*) and besides it was flattering to have the *Times* ask me and—

Well, anyway, I wrote the article and it appeared in the Sunday Times Magazine Section on August 16, 1964 (just in case all you Gentle Readers intend to make a mad dash for the library to read it).

Promptly, though, I paid the price of having swerved from my way of life, for the day after the article appeared, I got another flattering request to do a similar article for someone else. Then I received another flattering request to go on one of these conversation-type radio spots to answer telephoned questions from listeners ("Quick predictions on any subject off the top of your head, Dr. Asimov") and so on. Naturally, I had to continue to accept flattering requests.

Yet if I don't make a tremendous effort to wrench loose, I may be tabbed for life as a keen-eyed infallible peerer into the future and the gentle joys of nut-dom may be forever withdrawn from me.

Perhaps I can lift the spell by using my rostrum here to describe my view of the predictive aspects of science fiction. Then people, getting the True View of it all, may stop asking me to play the uncongenial role of prophet.

To the outsider (that is, to the dweller beyond the pale, to whom the term "science fiction" conjures up fuzzy vistas of Flash Gordon and of Monsters from the Black Lagoon) the one serious aspect of science fiction is that it predicts things; and by this they usually mean that it predicts *specific* things.

The outsider, aware that science-fiction writers wrote about atomic power decades before the Bomb was invented, imagines that those writers painstakingly described the theory of uranium fission. Or, knowing that science-fiction writers have discussed trips to the Moon, imagines that those writers carefully included blueprints of three-stage rockets.

The fact is, however, the science-fiction writers are invariably vague. The mere fact that I talk about positronic robots and say they are guided by the Three Laws of Robotics has no actual predictive value from the engineering standpoint. Imagine, for instance, a discussion between an interviewer (Q) and myself (A).

Q. What *is* a positronic robot, sir?

A. One with a positronic brain.

Q. And what is a positronic brain?

A. One in which positronic shifts take the place of the electronic shifts in the living human brain.

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Q. But why should positronics be superior to electronics for the purpose?

A. I don't know.

Q. How do you keep your positrons from combining with electrons and forming a flood of energy that will melt down the robot into a puddle of metal.

A. I haven't the vaguest notion.

Q. For that matter, how do you translate positronic flows into the "Three Laws of Robotics."

A. Beats me.

I'm not ashamed of this. In writing my robot stories it is not my intention to describe robot-engineering in detail. It was merely my intention to describe a society in which advanced robots were common and to try to work out possible resulting consequences.

My focus was not on the specifics at all, but on generality.

Of course, a specific prediction may come true, but when it does, I am willing to bet that in virtually every case there is some extenuating circumstance that makes the prediction a non-prediction after all.

I can cite an example from among my own stories but before I do that and proceed to antagonize all and sundry by seeming to hold myself up as a model, I wish to describe a case in which I fell lamentably and laughably short of predictive accuracy.

I once wrote a short story entitled "Everest" in which I explained man's failure to climb Mt. Everest by saying that its peak was occupied by a Martian observation party and that the Abominable Snowmen were really—yes, you guessed it.

I sold that story on April 7, 1953 and Mt. Everest was successfully climbed, with no signs of Martians, on May 20, 1953. (The story was published a half-year later anyway.)

Now I can safely pass on to something that *sounds* like an accurate prediction. In my story "Super-Neutron" I have one character ask another if he remembers "the first atomic power plants of a hundred and seventy years ago and how they operated?"

"I believe" came the answer "that they used the classical uranium fission method for power. They bombarded uranium with slow neutrons and split it up into masurium, barium, gamma rays and more neutrons, thus establishing a cyclic process."

When I read this passage to people, nothing happens—until I show them that the issue of the magazine in which the story appeared is dated September 1941 and tell them it hit the stands in July 1941

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and that the story was written in December 1940. This was two years *before* the first self-sustaining nuclear reactor was built and twelve years *before* the first nuclear power plant designed to produce electricity for civilian use was built.

To be sure, I wasn't able to predict that element number 43 was only called "masurium" temporarily, through a false-alarm discovery, and that when the element was *really* discovered it came to be called "technetium." In fact, it had been really discovered a couple of years before the story was written, but the new name given it had not yet reached me. Then, too, I didn't quite have the brains to say "chain reaction" instead of "cyclic process."

Even so, is it not an amazing prediction?

Nonsense! It wasn't prediction at all.

The story was written one year *after* uranium fission was discovered and announced. Once the announcement had been made, all talk about nuclear bombs and nuclear power plants was merely self-evident elaboration.

In early 1944, Cleve Cartmill's story "Deadline" appeared. It described the consequences of using an atomic bomb in such graphic correctness (a full year and a quarter *before* the first bomb was exploded at Alamogordo) that the FBI was alerted. And even that was not true prediction, but merely the self-evident elaboration of a known discovery.

My thesis is, in short, that it is *not* the details that are predicted; not the specific engineering points; not the gadgets; not the gimmicks. All predictions of that sort are either non-predictions or fortuitous strokes of luck and are, in any case, unimportant.

The broad vague brush with which the science-fiction writer sketches the future is particularly suitable for the broad vague movements of social reaction. The science-fiction writer is concerned with the wide sweeps of history, not the minutiae of gadgetry.

Let me give you an example of what I considered the greatest piece of true prediction ever to have appeared in any science-fiction story. That story is "Solution Unsatisfactory" by Robert Heinlein (under his pseudonym of Anson MacDonald). It appeared in early 1941, over half a year before Pearl Harbor, and at a time when Hitler was at the high-noon of his conquests.

The story dealt with the end of World War II and it was wrong in many details. For instance, Heinlein did not manage to foresee Pearl Harbor and so the United States, in the story, remained at peace.

He did, however, foresee that the United States would organize a

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huge research program to develop a nuclear weapon. To be sure, it wasn't an atomic bomb that Heinlein had them invent but "atomic dust." (In a way, he skipped the Bomb and went on to fallout.)

Since Pearl Harbor had never happened (in the story), the atomic weapon was not used on Japanese cities, but on German ones. It ended the war and other nations (notably the Soviet Union) were kept from disturbing the peace further by the mere existence of the bomb in American hands.

But now, what was to be done with the weapon? The narrator of the story felt gleefully (even before the weapon had been used) that with this power in American hands, world peace would be enforced and the millennium would arrive in the form of a "Pax Americana."

But the hero of the story thinks otherwise. He says (and I hope Heinlein doesn't mind my quoting two paragraphs):

"Hmmm—I wish it were that easy. But it won't remain our secret; you can count on that. It doesn't matter how successfully we guard it; all that anyone needs is the hint given by the dust itself and then it is just a matter of time until some other nation develops a technique to produce it. You can't stop brains from working, John; the reinvention of the method is a mathematical certainty, once they know what it is they are looking for. And uranium is a common enough substance, widely distributed over the globe—don't forget that!

"It's like this: Once the secret is out—and it will be out if we ever use the stuff!—the whole world will be comparable to a room full of men, each armed with a loaded .45. They can't get out of the room and each one is dependent on the good will of every other one to stay alive. All offense and no defense. See what I mean?"

What to do then? Consider Heinlein's title again: "Solution Unsatisfactory."

The point is that Heinlein predicted the nuclear stalemate that exists today, before the nuclear age had been opened. A full seven years after Heinlein had made his prediction, most American policy-makers still lulled themselves to sleep with the thought that we had a monopoly in the secret of the nuclear bomb that would last for generations because we alone had something called "Yankee know-how."

Not only is the nuclear stalemate harder to predict than the bomb; it is the nuclear stalemate that is the important prediction. Think how much easier it was to produce the Bomb than it is proving to produce a safe way out of the nuclear stalemate. Think, therefore, how useful it would have been for policymakers to have spent some time thinking of the consequences of the Bomb and not merely of the Bomb.

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Science fiction performs its most useful function, then, not in predicting gadgets, but in predicting social consequences. In its task of predicting social consequences, it could be a tremendous force for human betterment.

Let me try to make this point even clearer by considering a hypothetical case. Pretend it is the year 1880 and that the automobile is the exciting gadget of the future that is being visualized by all science fiction writers. What kind of a story do you suppose might have been written, in 1880, around an automobile of the then-future?

The automobile might have been viewed simply as a gadget. The story can be filled with all sorts of scientific gobbledy-gook describing the workings of the automobile. There could be the excitement of a last-minute failure in the framistan and the hero can be described as ingeniously designing a liebestraum out of an old baby-carriage at the last minute and cleverly hooking it to the bispallator in such a way as to mutonate the karrogel.

(Of course, that's nonsense, but I can name you a number of stories written in that precise style, except that I won't because the authors are large-fisted, evil-tempered men.)

Another way is to view the automobile as a mere adjunct to adventure. Anything you can do on a horse you can do in an automobile, so you write a Western and go through it, crossing out "horse" and writing in "car."

You could then write, for instance: "The automobile came thundering down the stretch, its mighty tires pounding, and its tail-assembly switching furiously from side to side, while its flaring foam-flecked air-intake seemed rimmed with oil." Then, when the car has finally performed its task of rescuing the girl and confounding the bad guys, it sticks its fuel hose into a can of gasoline and quietly fuels itself.

Of course, I'm being satirical, but I wonder how far removed from reality that is. I'm willing to bet that lots of would-be science-fiction writers start stories as follows: "The space-ship skidded to a halt five million miles outside Venus, its brake-linings scorched and squealing."

The only reason we don't see such stories is that editors see them first.

Obviously, writing a science-fiction story in which an automobile is nothing more than a gadget, or merely a super-horse, is a waste of time. Oh, it may make an honest dollar for the writer and it may give the reader an hour's honest amusement, but where is its importance? It has "predicted the automobile", yes, but predicting the mere existence of the automobile is *nothing*.

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What about the effect of the automobile on society and on people? After all it is *people* that interest people.

For instance, suppose you consider the automobile as an object turned out by the millions for the use of anyone who cares to buy one (You are still in 1880, remember!) Imagine a whole population placed on wheels.

Won't cities spread out since no one will have to live immediately next to his place of his business? He can live twenty miles away yet go scooting in each morning and out each evening. In short, won't cities be suburbanized while their centers fall into decay?

And if you have millions of cars, won't you have to crisscross the nation with highways? And how will that affect vacation habits? And status-seeking? And the railroads? And if youngsters can drive off somewhere in cars, how will that affect the status of youth? Of sex? Of women?

You may think, of course, that it is easy to look back on the pre-automobile age from the present and talk about what must come. And I must admit that I take a backseat to no one in the unerring clarity of my hindsight.

But foresight is not completely impossible, either. Back in 1901, H. G. Wells, with the automobile age merely beginning, wrote a book entitled "Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought" in which, among other things, he described the modern motor-age with astonishing accuracy.

Very well, then, you are going to write a science-fiction story in 1880 about the automobile and you are going to do something less trivial than merely to predict the automobile. You are going to pick your plot out of the fascinating changes the automobile is going to bring to society. What's more, you'll pick one of the few changes that even H. G. Wells didn't anticipate.

Let's start— You have your motorized society. Every head of a family has a car; some have two. Every morning several hundred thousand cars enter the city from its ring of suburbs; every evening several hundred thousand cars return. The city becomes a giant organism, inhaling cars every morning, exhaling cars every evening.

Very good so far. Now we have our hero—ordinary chap, clean-cut, wife, two children, sense of humor, excellent driver. He's being inhaled by the city. There he is, moving along into the city with many, many other cars; all moving in; all converging—

Aha! And when all the cars get into the city, where do they go? That's it! That's it! There's the title of the story: "Make Room!" The

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contents? A delightful satire about our hero spending all day looking for a parking spot and, in the process, meeting traffic jams, taxi-drivers, traffic cops, trucks, parking meters, filled garages, fire hydrants, etc. etc.

A delightful satire, that is, in 1880. In 1965, it would bear more of the nature of stark, realistic tragedy.

Consider now: —

If such a story had actually been written in 1880 and had caught on thoroughly enough to have interested policy-makers, would it not have been just barely possible that city-growth from 1880 on might have been directed with an eventual motor-civilization in mind?

Think of it, oh, those of you who live in northeastern cities such as New York or Boston which have been cleverly designed for nothing more elaborate than the push-cart and tell me what reward would be sufficient for the writer who had performed such a service.

Do you see, then, that the important prediction is not the automobile, but the parking problem; not radio, but the soap-opera; not the income tax but the expense account; not the Bomb but the nuclear stalemate? Not the action, in short, but the reaction?

Of course, to expect the men of 1880 to have planned cities for an eventual motorized society is perhaps to expect too much of human nature. I wonder, though, if to expect the equivalent today may not be expecting barely enough.

For a century now, we've been watching social changes take place at an ever-increasing pace and have been watching ourselves being caught flat-footed, with consequences of ever-increasing dislocation.

By now, we've learned to expect change, even drastic change, and we are resigning ourselves to the necessity of anticipating, of planning in advance.

The very existence and popularity of science fiction is an indication of how the inevitability of change is coming to be accepted. And one of the functions of science fiction is to make the fact of change less unpalatable to the average human being.

No matter how much the general populace ignored science fiction and laughed at it, they could not remain completely unaware of its contents. Some of its subject matter seeped into the general consciousness, even if only by way of greatly diluted and distorted comic strips. For that reason the coming of nuclear weapons, of missiles, of man-made satellites did not meet with the psychological resistance they might have once.

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Well, then, enough of the past. We're in the present and the task of the science-fiction writer lies in considering the future—the real future of 1965, not the hind-sight one of 1880.

We are in the midst of at least four sets of first-class revolutionary changes, each of which is following a clear and inevitable path. What will the reaction be to each of these sets of changes?

The first and most frightening is the "population explosion" and science fiction has considered that in a number of ways. I can think of a number of stories set against the background of a drastically overpopulated Earth. "The Caves of Steel" is an example from among my own stories and another is "Gravy Planet" ("Space Merchants") by Frederick Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth.

The most savage and effective story of this sort (at least, in my opinion) was Frederick Pohl's "The Census Takers" in which population was held at a desirable level by the simple device of taking a world census every ten years and shooting every thirteenth individual counted.—Or fifteenth, or ninth, or whatever fraction was estimated as being required.

This is "anti-prediction" if I may coin a term. Fred Pohl obviously didn't think this was going to happen. He knew—we all know—that such a solution is unthinkable.

But the anti-prediction of an impossibility has its uses, too. By its sheer shock-value it may force people who are only too prone to solve the insoluble by ignoring it to stop and think. All right, we *don't* shoot the surplus at random. What alternative, then, is there?

Another revolutionary change is the "automation explosion." That, of course, involves the rapid arrival of a world equivalent to that familiar science-fiction situation in which all manual labor and much of the mental labor is done by robots. What happens to mankind in that case? Karl Capek took up that problem in "R.U.R." as long ago as 1921. A more recent example is Jack Williamson's "With Folded Hands—"

What kind of a world will we live in, anyway, when meaningful work becomes a luxury available only to the few; when boredom becomes a world-wide disease. Can times become even more neurotic than they are now? Well, read "Coming Attraction" by Fritz Leiber on our neurotic future.

A third revolutionary change is the "information explosion," for scientific discoveries are coming so thickly and quickly that the human mind has become incapable of grasping, in full depth, more than an extremely narrow specialty.

My own attempt in this direction was a story called "Dead Hand"

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in which I postulated the existence of professional science writers who winnowed out the scientific work of others and then wrote papers that were concise and clear. They served, furthermore, as the bridge across the specialties, with the broad, cross-disciplinary (if superficial) knowledge.

A fourth major change is the "freedom explosion," the emergence of the erstwhile colonies, the revolution of the "natives"—and the concomitant civil rights movement within the United States.

Science-fiction writers have not, perhaps, worked at this as thoroughly as upon the others. Ray Bradbury had an excellent story called, if memory serves me, "Way in the Middle of the Air" about the effect upon the United States of a mass migration of Negroes to Mars. I, myself, somewhat more realistically, viewed the emergence of an independent Africa in my story "The Evitable Conflict" (published in 1950, by the way, well before the fact). Then, too, in my novel, "The Currents of Space" I dealt—but not very explicitly, I must admit—with the role of the Negro in the colonization of the Galaxy.

Anyway, these are some of the major changes we are facing, each one of which will suffice to disrupt the world we know, before a single generation has passed. If the disruption is to be kept from turning into disintegration, we must make intelligent guesses as to where we're going and act upon them *now*.

It is the function of the science-fiction writer (aside from earning a living and pleasing his readers) to make those guesses, and that makes him the most important servant (in my opinion) that humanity now possesses.

To be sure, the science-fiction writer is no longer the only one making such guesses. Matters have progressed to the point where various government agencies, research institutions and industrial concerns are desperately trying to peer into the clouded crystal ball. But it's my personal guess that nearly every man in government or industry who is so engaged was at one time or another a science-fiction reader.

—So now look what I've done. I started the article with the intention of complaining about having to write these difficult articles of prediction and I end by convincing myself I ought to write more of them.

Apparently, I wasn't able to predict the end of this article when I began it.

So much for my predictive ability.

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After staring as if hypnotized at a letter from our County Clerk stamped Jury Service Supports Law And Order And The American Way Of Life, *we turned, rather slowly, to our customary labors, which include writing introductions for stories: Lo, this one on top the pile. Suppose there are only two men left, of whom one is not even a man, and a work is brought into judgement? Who, then, the judge; and who the jury? Or is there not—and isn't there always?—at least one Imponderable?*

OF TIME AND THE YAN

by Roger Zelazny

THE LAST YAN ON MARS SAT alone in a room.

There was a knock on the door.

"Come in," he threeked.

The Earthman looked about, squinting into the dimness.

"Hello?"

"I am here," threeked the Yan, moving toward him.

The Earthman pressed back against the door, making little noises deep in his throat.

"You're real!" he decided.

"I am a Yan," replied the other, "and you are a man, late of the late green star."

"Yes, late—very late . . . There were two expeditions . . ."

"Unfortunate," answered the Yan. "Both ships were destroyed when they landed."

The man covered his face.

"So was mine."

He was silent for a long time.

"The atmosphere," he said, finally. "It must have oxidized the fuel—somehow."

"Of course."

The Yan waited patiently. Finally, the man spoke again.

"Could you—would you—help me?"

"How?" asked the Yan.

"I need shovels. I need help—to dig three graves."

There was blood on the man's arm.

"How is it that you lived?"

"I left the ship immediately, to see if the air was breathable. I crossed a little hill. Something hit me on the shoulder. There was a bright flash . . . A noise . . . My wife and children . . ."

"I will get shovels," threeked

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the Yan. "I will be glad to bury more Earthmen."

The Yan sleeched across the field, beside the dripping man. The sky was a blizzard of dancing motes; they obscured the stars, stretching like a gossamer curtain from horizon to dark horizon.

"For two months your world has stopped the sunlight and the light of the stars. Will it ever dissipate?"

"I don't know."

"Why did you come here?"

"I knew it was going to happen," said the man. "I was an officer at the Base. I stole the ship, took my family . . ."

"You deserted?"

"To save their lives."

"I see," answered the Yan. "Shall we dig their graves here?"

The man nodded. He did not look at the ship.

He lifted pound after painful pound of the sugar-white ocean.

The sand churned; the Yan spun his double-bladed shovel like a paddle wheel.

The sun entered the Way of Earth, like a red balloon seen through frosted glass, and the Earthman looked up from his labors.

"Yan, Yan, you are making a mistake," he wheezed. "You are digging four graves."

"I am not making a mistake," answered the Yan.

The man fetched the charred bodies from the smouldering rubble. He dragged and carried them to the gravesides.

The Yan watched.

He crossed the arms over the chests and lowered them into the holes.

"Yan, please help me to cover them."

The Yan threw dirt in their faces.

"It is done," said the Earthman.

"No!" threeked the Yan.

The Earthman looked at him, a new darkness behind his bloodshot gaze. He fumbled at his belt.

"No, Yan. Not me. Not me!"

"Yes, Earthman, you."

"Why? What would you gain by killing me?"

"I do not understand 'gain'. Why not kill you? You are all that remains of Earth, but a silver net in the sky.—And I am the last. The last Yan on Mars. I will bury Earth here. The net will come undone. Yan shall be last on Mars."

The Earthman pointed his gun at him.

"No, I'll kill you first."

The Yan threeked a laugh.

"Only Time can kill a Yan."

The Earthman fired three times.

The Yan threeked in merriment.

The man fired his remaining cartridges.

"Now you will get into the hole, and I will take your life away."

The Earthman made small noises.

"Get into your grave!"

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Unwillingly, his legs moved. Involuntarily, he stepped into the hole and turned his head upwards.

"Good-bye, Earth," threeked the Yan.

"Wait!" cried the man. "Give me a moment, please—to pray!"

"I do not know 'pray'," threeked the Yan. "Do it and I will watch, if it does not take you long."

The man bowed his head. He rested his hands on the lip of the excavation.

"Are you finished?" asked the Yan.

"Yes," answered the man, straightening, his fists clenched.

Once more, he looked up at the Yan.

Then he threw two handfuls of sand into all his violet eyes.

The Yan threeked in anger and sleeched back.

Gathering his strength, the man leaped from the hole and seized the shovel. He smashed the Yan's head.

A dark, sticky fluid drenched the blade.

The Yan lay still.

The Earthman pushed him into the hole, then covered him over. He planted the shovel in the ground and staggered back toward the dwelling-place.

"You were right," he muttered. "It only took time."

The Way of Earth flamed above him.

The last man on Mars sat alone in the gloom.

There was a knock on the door.

"There is no time," came the threek.

CONVENTION TIME

The 18th Annual West Coast Science Fantasy Conference will be held at the Edgewater Inn, Long Beach, California, over the July 4th weekend. Events will include: a costume ball, art show, movies and slides, auction, speeches and informal talks. The convention committee further promises a relaxed, friendly convention *and* good weather. Guest of honor will be Frank Herbert. Membership is $1.00 (checks payable to Rick Sneary). Address: Westercon XVIII, 5571 Belgrave Ave., Garden Grove, California.

The 23rd World Science Fiction Convention will be held this year in London, from August 27 to August 30. More details in a later issue.

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Man has been inclined to look up rather than down in his quest for new frontiers. However, we are confident that the wealth of the 60% of this planet that lies beneath the seas, the fact that the bottom of the Pacific Ocean covers an area much greater than the surface of the moon—we are sure that these things are not being overlooked by the Authorities, and, in time, man may be making his home somewhere in liquid space. But until that damp day, the sea will fascinate us as one of the few remaining sources of romance, mystery, and rich legend. Robert Arthur's contribution appears below—an enchanting nautical fantasy—of golden voiced mermaids, of Jabez O'Brien with the soul of a dreamer, who charts the bottom of the sea quite by accident, and finds, of course, Davy Jones' locker.

JABEZ O'BRIEN AND DAVY JONES' LOCKER

by Robert Arthur

SOME PEOPLE WILL SAY THAT this story should start with Jabez O'Brien rowing his dory at midnight, oars muffled, into that patch of fog to meet the most wondrous adventure ever to befall a seagoing man. But if the story starts there, how are you to know who Jabez O'Brien was, and what he was up to, anyway?

No, it isn't practical. So, begging your pardon, I'll start with Jabez himself and work up to the adventure in its own good time.

Jabez O'Brien was a fisherman born. His father and his father's father before him had been fishermen, and so on back as long as there had been O'Brien's. And as long as there had been fish, like as not.

The Jabez part of him was solid, rock-ribbed New England, practical and industrious. But the O'Brien side of him was Irish. And at Jabez' birth on Fish Island, which lies off the coast of Maine, some passing spirit with a sense of mischief must have been present. Perhaps it was a

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leprechaun, blown off course and seeking passage back to Ireland. Whatever it was, it gave Jabez the soul of a dreamer.

The result was that as he grew up the Jabez part and the O'Brien part of him just didn't pull oar together. On the sea of life Jabez went first one way; then the other, and looked likely to wind up no place.

When he put his mind to it, young Jabez was a welcome hand on any fishing boat in New England waters. The trouble was, just as the Jabez part of him started to get somewhere in the world—such as owning his own boat—the O'Brien part of him would issue different orders. Then he'd start wool-gathering and daydreaming and let his boat wreck itself on a reef, and almost drown himself. Which happened once and didn't happen twice because he couldn't save enough for another boat.

When Jabez daydreamed, it was about quite various matters. Sometimes he imagined that he was wise and famous. Sometimes he thought how nice it would be to be wealthy and happy. Sometimes he daydreamed he was all four things at the same time. Which just shows you how impractical he could be when he tried.

Mostly though, young Jabez daydreamed of things nautical, the older the better. It seemed to him that in this twentieth century, though the sea was still large, mysterious, and dangerous, too much romance had gone out of life. Jabez couldn't help sighing over the days when the fabulous Sir Francis Drake became the first Englishman to sail around the whole world, and then later helped whip the mighty Spanish Armada when it came to invade England in the year 1588.

Then there was Captain Cook, another mighty navigator, who discovered much territory in the younger days of the world. Though of course he did get himself killed and eaten by cannibals on one of his voyages.

Oh, the old days were glorious times in Jabez O'Brien's imagination. Many's the day when, all inside his own mind, he sailed into the unknown with Cook, fought Spaniards with Drake, or looted gold-laden convoys with the notorious pirate, Blackbeard.

But the result was—Well, you can imagine it easily when I tell you that the town where Jabez lived was called Fishtown by its inhabitants, just as the island was called Fish Island. I'm speaking now of the names used by the natives who lived there, not the names on the map used by the summer visitors.

You can see that folk who called their town Fishtown and their island Fish Island would not have much regard for day

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dreams about the past. So, tall and broad-shouldered though he was, their attitude toward Jabez O'Brien was a little pitying, as toward one afflicted with an unfortunate handicap.

Even the girls of Fish Island shared this feeling, despite his merry eyes and curly black hair. For girls, and this is a secret I'm telling you, are very practical creatures for all their dainty looks. At least the Fish Island girls were. And they were of no mind to walk to the altar with someone who, like as not, would start daydreaming while his boat wrecked itself and he drowned himself, leaving them with no man in the house.

Jabez found this out when he proposed first to Susan Chavez, the most beautiful girl on the island. Susan said no, quite promptly.

Then he proposed to Nancy Lamb, the second most beautiful girl on the island. And Nancy said no also, though she made him wait a bit.

Finally he proposed to Maria Wellman, the third most beautiful girl on the island. And Maria also said no, though she made him wait the longest of all.

After this third rejection, Jabez did some hard thinking. There were other girls on Fish Island, but none of them took his fancy, though he sometimes noticed that Nora Farrington, whose hair was reddish and who had a silvery laugh, was very easy to dip and whirl with when the Fisherman's Association held a dance in the recreation hall. But in his opinion her mouth was too wide and her eyes set too far apart.

It was plain to Jabez that he must change the mind of Susan, or Nancy, or Maria. And to do this, he must change his station in life, become a man of importance on Fish Island. This he could do by becoming rich, which seemed impossible, or perhaps by becoming famous. Which seemed equally impossible.

Nevertheless, after long thought, Jabez decided on a plan of action.

He decided to catch a mermaid.

That would certainly make him famous, for no man had ever actually caught a mermaid before. And he could exhibit her to summer visitors and make a nice bit of change doing it. Then certainly Susan or Nancy, or at least Maria, would take a second thought and change her "no" to a "yes."

Jabez' plan was not as farfetched as you may think. There was a cove on Fish Island where a mermaid was known to appear at certain intervals. True, no one had actually seen her, but daring seamen, most of them smugglers, had heard her singing in the night. And it is well known that mermaids have beautiful singing voices.

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One grizzled old fisherman, José Sebastian, swore a solemn oath he had not only heard the mermaid sing, but she sang in Spanish. He had heard her one foggy night during Prohibition days when, as you may know, quite a bit of smuggling was done. At the time he had been landing some rare wines secretly in Mermaid Cove, as it was called. On hearing the singing he had left so promptly he had lost the entire cargo, which gave him a good memory for the year and night it had happened.

So you can see why no one on Fish Island doubted that a mermaid really came to Mermaid Cove to sing. At least sometimes. Because the older fisherman had calculated, putting together all the reports they could come by, that she did not appear more than once every ten years.

Mermaid Cove was inaccessible and dangerous, even for smugglers. Landward, rugged cliffs made it almost unapproachable. Seaward, reefs made it impossible to enter except at high tide in a small boat. Sudden squalls blew up there on the slightest provocation, and without notice. It was a good place to stay away from, and the men of Fish Island, being sensible, stayed away from it.

I'm not speaking of Jabez O'Brien, now, of course.

Jabez had visited Mermaid Cove more than once. And as a lad of 13, after climbing over the rugged cliffs in the darkness, he had actually heard song riding in from the cove on the ocean breeze one June night. Golden-voiced song such as José Sebastian swore to.

He hadn't been able to see the mermaid—it was too dark. But he had heard her. He knew she had been there.

Thinking back now with care, Jabez recalled that the night he heard the mermaid sing had been the night of his 13th birthday. He had received a thumping from his father for staying out so late, which had also helped fix the date in his mind.

Now a sudden idea came to Jabez. After a hurried visit to see old José Sebastian, he pulled some ancient nautical almanacs down from his shelves. With growing excitement he checked off certain dates. When he finished, he was breathing hard.

He had heard the mermaid sing just thirty years to the exact night after José Sebastian had. And putting together all the evidence, Jabez now felt quite certain that the mermaid appeared in Mermaid Cove only on the night of June 15, in every tenth year.

But what made his pulse pound hardest was the realization that his own 23rd birthday came on June 15th, one week off. It would mark ten years exactly from the night on which he himself had

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first heard the song of the mermaid. According to all logic, she would be there again in a week, and if he were there also, with the proper kind of net, he could capture her. That was how simple it was.

(Now at this point I should tell you that Jabez' thinking was fine and clear. He had indeed stumbled on something no one else had yet puzzled out. But not having full information he missed the truth of it by a trifle. The truth was even more wonderful than he thought. But to learn exactly what it was, read on.)

At all events, there Jabez was at midnight of June 15th, rowing into Mermaid Cove in a borrowed dory by the light of a three-quarter moon. On the seat beside him was a large net which he mended with nylon fish line until it was strong enough to hold a walrus, much less a delicate mermaid. His oars were muffled, he breathed softly, and he rowed with utmost quiet toward a large patch of fog which sat, most suspiciously, just in the middle of the calm water of the cove.

As he came near it, he heard song. A woman's voice—or a mermaid's—soared from the patch of fog. Jabez gave the dory a last pull and scrambled up into the bow, taking the net in his hand.

Then the dory slid into the fog itself, and Jabez eyes came close to popping from his head. For inside the patch of fog the moon showed, not a mermaid seated on a rock, but a vessel peacefully at anchor. And the vessel was a Spanish galleon of a type that he knew had not sailed the seas for two centuries or more.

Yet there it rode, sails furled, all in darkness, the sound of a woman singing coming down to him from the broad windows of the captain's cabin aft. And beneath the sound of song he heard other voices, men's voices, murmuring, together with a clicking sound he could have sworn was the roll of dice on a wooden deck.

Jabez, forgetting what he had come for, gave a cry of astonishment. Then his dory hit the side of the great Spanish galleon. He expected a violent shock but instead the dory went right into the anchored ship as if it had been made of—well, not quite of mist, but perhaps of whipped cream.

In another moment Jabez O'Brien, his mind spinning, was inside the ship, in among holds and cabins, getting fleeting glimpses of Spanish sailors eating and drinking and making merry. And then as if his cry had been a signal, the ship was sinking spang on top of him, plummeting toward the bottom, pressing him down as it went even though he slid through it in a most peculiar manner.

Jabez suddenly found himself and his dory in the captain's cabin itself, being stared at by a Spanish

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grandee in full finery with a wine glass in his hand. A gentleman in the garb of an English naval officer of some centuries ago stood beside him, also holding a glass. And a beautiful young woman whose long black hair was held in place by a jeweled comb broke off singing to look at Jabez in astonishment and reproach.

In that moment Jabez at last realized the truth. There was no mermaid. He had heard a ghost singing. For the young lady and the captain and the ship itself could only be ghostly forms resurrected from ancient times. Then, before he could think further, as he stared at the phantoms and they at him, his dory went under water. Being in the act of taking in a deep breath of astonishment, he took in water instead. And as the sea sucked him down, all went black in his mind.

When at last Jabez O'Brien opened his eyes a trifle, he said exactly what you or I would have.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"Ho!" a great voice roared. "Ho, ho!"

Jabez opened his eyes wide. Standing beside him was a somewhat odd individual, a full eight feet tall, with shoulders like the limbs of an oak and legs as sturdy as the mainmast of a sailing ship. His eyes were the green of the sea where it is shallow and his hair the blue of the ocean where it goes down to unplumbed depths. He wore only canvas trousers, hitched around his waist with a live eel.

Across the massive chest of the individual laughing at him, Jabez saw tatooed an American flag. As the fellow chuckled, his chest muscles rippled so that Old Glory seemed to be snapping in a half gale.

"Why, lad," the huge fellow said, "you're in Davy Jones' Locker. And I'm Davy Jones, at your service."

"To speak the truth," Jabez said, sitting up, "That's what I was afraid of. I knew I'd meet you some day, sir, but I hoped it wouldn't be so soon. No offense intended."

"And none taken," said Davy Jones, his laughter ceasing. "To be accurate about it, Jabez O'Brien, you've arrived too early. Sixty-five years, four months, three weeks and one day too early."

"I never was good at keeping to a schedule," said Jabez. "Well, at least you're American. That's some consolation."

"Why, Jabez," said Davy Jones, "I'm not American. I'm not English or French or Russian or Spanish or anything else. I'm Ocean, and have been since the first man went out on salt water in a hollow log.

"I'm the Keeper of the Locker, and I receive all those who drown at sea. In order to make the shock a bit less, every man sees me as

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he thinks of me. If you were a Viking of the old days, you'd be seeing me with a horned helmet on my head and a wolfskin around my waist."

"Have I drowned then?" Jabez asked, with a natural curiosity.

He looked around him with interest, for he did not feel drowned, not by many a nautical mile. The room he was in had a rounded dome of a roof many feet above his head. As Jabez' eyes became adjusted, he saw that the room was a grotto in natural rock, its walls decorated with pearls by the million, some as big as his fist. The light came from even larger pearls, big as bowling balls, spaced here and there, each one with a glowing, phosphorescent jellyfish on it to give off illumination. And the huge bed he sat on might have been made of silk-smooth seaweed or of rare draperies too long underwater.

Without asking, Jabez knew it must be Davy Jones' own personal bedroom.

"Have you drowned?" Davy repeated his words. "Now that's a good question, a very good question. And right at the moment I'm not prepared to say."

"Then I'm alive?" Jabez asked, springing to his feet. "I'm not dead?"

"Hold on!" roared Davy Jones. "I didn't say that. But if you're dead you're here sixty-five years too soon, and if you're alive you shouldn't be here at all. This is a very tricky case, young Jabez O'Brien, and it will take a bit of studying on my part.

"Why," he asked, with such a sigh that he blew out a dozen jellyfish, "did you ever have to sail smack into the ghost of the Spanish galleon *Princessa?* And indeed, right into the cabin of my good friend Don Alfredo Amandez, who went down with his ship and crew and beautiful daughter and English captive some two hundred years ago. Or was it three hundred?"

"Then that *was* a ghost ship!" Jabez exclaimed. "And it was a ghost girl singing. While all the time I thought it was a mermaid I was about to catch."

"Mermaids!" snorted Davy Jones "They aren't in my department. Only ships that sink at sea and folks who go down with them or otherwise end up beneath the waters come under my jurisdiction. But when you got tangled up in the ghost of the *Princessa,* Don Alfredo didn't know what to do with you. So he pushed your dory free and brought you to me, seeing that he was coming here anyway, to join the Gathering."

"The Gathering?" Jabez asked, puzzled.

"Aye, the Hundred Year Gathering," Davy told him. "I see I shall have to tell you some things most men learn little by little while fish nibble on them. So here's the

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lay of the matter, and keep your ears open while I talk."

And indeed, what Davy Jones had to tell him took careful listening to understand, though when Davy finished, it seemed tolerably plain to Jabez.

When a ship went down at sea, it and all aboard came under Davy Jones' personal custody. The whole sea bottom was his locker, but this spot where Jabez was, of which Davy's bedroom was only the tiniest part, was a most tremendous hollowed-out harbor beneath a volcanic island, was the center of his domain.

One night every ten years, the ghost of a sunken vessel might rise again and the ghosts of its crew and passengers could enjoy a sight of the world above. For an hour they could do as they pleased, before returning to their rest in the waters that had claimed them.

Some several hundred years before, the Spanish ship *Princessa,* Don Alfredo Amandez captain, with his beautiful daughter and a treasure in gold aboard, had been blown far north of his course by a gale. Sighted by an English frigate, he had been engaged in battle. The two ships coming alongside, the crews had fought savagely hand to hand until a sudden storm endangered both. The English ship had cast off and sailed away to England, leaving behind her captain, Sir Andrew Blade, seriously wounded. The *Princessa* had been blown onto the reefs of Mermaid Cove and sunk, on the night of June 15th in some year Davy Jones could not remember.

Since then her ghost had risen once every ten years, to lie at anchor in the cove while the ghostly crew yarned and feasted and diced. The ghostly Isabella, the captain's beautiful daughter, had used her hour to sing the songs that had soothed her father on the long voyage to the New World, from which he had never returned. And it was this scene—Isabella singing, her father and Sir Andrew Blade listening as they drank wine—that Jabez had so rudely interrupted with his mermaid hunting.

"At least I was right that it happened but once every ten years, on my birthday night," Jabez commented. "But what I do not understand, Davy Jones, is why, if it was a ghost ship, I did not go straight on through her. For it is well known that ghosts are quite airy and have no more body to them than a bit of fog."

To this Davy answered that at sea ghosts take on a greater substance out of the water from which they come. This answer Jabez could understand. But he had still another question.

"This Gathering," he said. "You spoke of a Hundred Year Gathering. This is something I have never heard of before."

"Nor has any living mortal,"

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Davy Jones answered. "Not," he added quickly, "that I'm admitting you are alive. You may just as well be drowned. I'm still studying the matter.

"But as to the Gathering. Once in every hundred years every last ship and every last man or woman or child who has been swallowed by the sea gathers here in the heart of my Locker for a frolic. Mayhap you have heard tell of Fiddler's Green, the seaman's paradise?"

Jabez nodded, and Davy continued, saying, "Fiddler's Green is really the Hundred Year Gathering. And the ghostly spirits of men and ships alike gather here for it. Now I've given you time and too much. Out you go to join the Gathering. Sir Andrew Blade will be your guide. Meantime I'll look into my books to see if you are dead, or alive, or quite possibly neither."

He turned to a shelf cut into the coral and took down a great, musty volume. As if at a signal the elegantly dressed Englishman Jabez had seen in the cabin of the ghost ship entered.

"Sir Andrew Blade, at your service," he said with a bow, Jabez responded in a like manner.

"Jabez O'Brien, who may be man or ghost or neither," he said. "If you are to be my guide, perhaps you can introduce me to Sir Francis Drake? And Captain James Cook, the great navigator, and Blackbeard, the equally great pirate? There are all of them by way of being heroes to me.

"Although," he added, remembering, "Captain Cook died ashore, did he not? Landing in Hawaii he was slain, and then eaten by cannibals. So he can't be here."

Sir Andrew chuckled. "He's here. His bones were returned to the sea, so he wound up in Davy Jones' Locker after all. But come along."

With that he led Jabez forth. Outside, the young man found himself in a tremendous harbor formed, as Davy had said, beneath a volcanic island. He could not guess the size of the harbor, but it was crowded with craft of every kind, from every corner of the world and every moment of time.

Within eyesight he could spot Viking ships with carved dragon prows, Roman galleys, clipper ships from the China trade, battleships both old and new, and anchored close at hand, a great gash in her prow, a steamship.

He peered more closely and saw her name—*Titanic*.

"This way," said his guide. "Captain Cook keeps to himself. He's glum because he has no ship, being killed on land by the natives, and not properly sunk with his vessel."

Sir Andrew led Jabez down a long wharf, and on all sides of him was merriment. Sailors roasted fish on spits, while others fid-

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dled that some might dance jigs and hornpipes. Here and there were family groups picnicing placidly amidst the confusion. In the harbor was a constant coming and going of ship's boats of every description, and some Jabez had never heard tell of before.

What with ghostly spirits from a thousand lands and untold centuries of history making the most of their freedom this once in a hundred years, Jabez walked with his eyes wide and astonished. The whole cavern was filled with the greenish light, as of being underwater, which came from millions of phosphorescent jellyfish tucked here and there into the walls. And in some places electric eels were attached to chandeliers taken from sunken steamships, and were making them glow, with great bursts of light.

Beneath one such patch of illumination, Jabez spied a group of English naval officers engaged in a game of ninepins on a smooth section of the wharf carved from coral.

"Sir Andrew:" he exclaimed. "Isn't that Sir Francis Drake himself? Knocking down ninepins, just as he did before he sailed out to smash the Spanish Armada?"

"That it is," said his guide. "And we'll see him next. Over here is Cook. We'll see if he feels like speaking to you."

He led Jabez toward a lonely figure, sitting apart from the merriment and staring glumly toward the harbor.

"A good day, Captain Cook," he called. "May I introduce to you young Jabez O'Brien, a visitor to the Gathering, an admirer of yours?"

Slowly, very slowly, Captain Cook turned. Jabez saw small eyes peer at him keenly from beneath bushy brows.

"He looks like a likely seaman," Captain Cook said. "Irish, I take it?"

"Of Irish descent, sir," Jabez said politely. "We're from Maine now."

"Maine? The Spanish Main?" asked Cook, brows gathering together.

"No, sir. Down East Maine."

"I don't believe I've ever heard of it," Captain Cook said shortly. "I didn't make landfall on any Main save the Spanish one, on my voyages."

"It's one of the newer countries, Captain," Sir Andrew put in. "Only two hundred years old or thereabouts. Perhaps you'd care to tell our young friend something of your famed trips?"

"There's little to tell," Cook sighed. "Last voyage, the ship sailed home. I didn't. Cook was the captain and the captain was cooked. Young man, let me give you some advice. Never let yourself be eaten by cannibals. You'll regret it as long as you live."

With that he turned and re-

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sumed his gloomy stare at a harbor which did not hold a ship for him to command. Sir Andrew nudged Jabez' elbow and led him away.

"He paid you a great compliment," he said. "He told you his favorite joke. Now let us speak to Drake. He's about finished with his game of bowls. In a few moments he'll be sailing out to attack the Spanish Armada."

"Attack the Armada!" Jabez exclaimed. "But he did that. Back in 1588 it was."

"Aye, and he'll do it again today," Sir Andrew said, leading Jabez toward the group of bowlers, who were applauding a roll in which Sir Francis Drake knocked down all nine of the pins.

"You see," he went on, "it's the big entertainment scheduled for this Gathering. For to a seaman a naval battle is what a mere game of baseball or cricket is to a landlubber. Each Gathering some great ocean battle is refought here in the heart of Davy Jones' locker. Afterwards, there is feasting and merrymaking. Aye, and dancing too, for we have many beautiful girls with us, though not as many as we sailors might wish."

"It's always been a dream of mine that I could have lived in the right age to fight with Drake against the Spaniards," Jabez O'Brien said. "At least, it will be a notable thing to see."

"As to that," said his guide, "perhaps Drake will give you a place on board one of ships now. Some of them are shorthanded—not all the crews went to Davy Jones' Locker. We'll ask him."

Well, I could go on for a long time telling you of Jabez O'Brien's adventures during that Hundred Year Gathering in Davy Jones' Locker. For one thing, he fought aboard an English man of war which engaged two Spanish ships simultaneously. And thought it was a ghostly battle, it was fought with great spirit, if you'll allow me the word, and much gunfire of a very realistic kind.

During the battle Jabez first was riddled by shot, then had his hand lopped off by a cutlass, and wound up with a cannonball going squarely through his midriff as well as being mishandled in other serious ways. When the battle was over and he was allowed to reassemble himself, he was heartily glad it was only playacting. He had lost all taste for warfare and never again daydreamed of the old times, of pirates and sea fights.

Then came the partying, which he enjoyed a great deal more. Sir Andrew introduced him, formally this time, to the Lady Isabella, whose singing had created the legend of the mermaid in Mermaid Cove. The Lady Isabella, looking at him from beneath lowered lashes, chided him for so rudely interrupting her song. But she for-

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gave him enough to dance with him.

Jabez would gladly have danced the entire night—or was it more than a night, for he could tell nothing of time?—with the Lady Isabella. But from her arms he found himself whirled into those of other ghost girls whose fate had been to cast final anchor with Davy Jones. There were blonde Viking lasses, and dusky South Seas beauties, and dozens more, all eager to dance with him. For he was a handsome stranger, and as Davy Jones had not yet decided about him, he was a deal less ghostly than the others present.

So time for Jabez O'Brien became confused entirely, and he could recall only whirling and dipping and spinning, and whispering many sweet nothings into willing ears.

Then abruptly Davy Jones was standing beside him again, blowing on a great bos'un's whistle. In the twinkling of an eye the ghostly multitude gave over merrymaking and each individual returned to his ship. The ships themselves upped anchors and moved off, Roman alleys with oars dipping, sailing ships bending far over before some ghostly breeze, steamships bellowing forth black smoke.

In a second twinkling of an eye they were speeding toward some entrance so far off Jabez could not see it. In a moment, it seemed, they had sailed away and gone and there were only Davy and Jabez left.

"All ships and crews return to the spots where they sank," Davy said. "There to rest until the next Gathering. Save of course for the ten year intervals when each can return to the surface for an hour to see the world above again. But you're still here, young Jabez, and to tell the truth, you're a thorny problem to me."

"I'm sorry to hear that," young Jabez answered. "It was never my intention to bother you, Davy Jones."

"I know, I know. You only wanted to capture a mermaid. Be that as it may, I've studied my books and my ledgers and I'm blowed if I can find a place to enter you. Dead or alive, you don't belong here and I'm sending you home again."

"Thank you, sir. Dead or alive, sir?"

"That's up to you, Jabez. I'm washing my hands of you. But this much I'll do. You've been put to considerable inconvenience, not altogether your own fault, so I'll grant you a wish before sending you off. If you wind up alive, you can use it. Contrarywise, at least I'll have done my best."

"That sounds fair," answered Jabez, already thinking hard what to request.

"So ask away, Jabez. Quickly. I have an appointment to meet a shipload of sailors just about to

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sign aboard with me up in the North Sea. What would you like?"

"Why," said Jabez, all in one breath, "I'd like to be richfamouswiseandhappy."

By it saying it very fast, as if it were all one word, he hoped it would count as a single wish.

"Ho!" Davy Jones bellowed. "Ho ho! Rich, famous, wise and happy, all at one and the same time! Jabez you rascal, even King Solomon couldn't manage all that. But—" and he clapped a great hand on the young man's shoulder, so that Jabez' knees buckled—"I'll do it. It so happens I've taken a liking to you."

"Thank you, sir," Jabez said.

"As to being rich," Davy told him, "you remember the rock in front of your little cottage, where you sit and look at the sea and daydream when you should be out doing some honest fishing?"

Jabez blushed slightly, but nodded.

"Under that rock are one hundred gold doubloons, hidden there by a survivor of the *Princessa* when she sank on the reefs of Mermaid Cove. They are just waiting for the rock to be overturned and found."

"No fisherman could ask for more wealth than that, sir," Jabez told him. "Being rich now I'll be able to marry the most beautiful girl on the island. Or at least the second most beautiful. Or at the very worst the third most beautiful. Then I'll be happy. As for being wise and famous, I can let those go I expect."

"Hold hard!" Davy Jones roared. "I'm not finished. I've given you wealth. If you get back alive, you'll be famous. Now to give you wisdom. Here it is. Don't marry the most beautiful girl on the island."

"Not marry Susan?" Jabez cried in astonishment. "Well then, I'll marry Nancy."

"And here's the next round of wisdom. Don't marry the second most beautiful girl on the island."

"Not marry Nancy either?" Jabez exclaimed, in still greater amazement. "At least there's still Maria left."

"And here's the final wisdom. Don't marry the third most beautiful girl on the island."

"Not Susan, or Nancy, or even Maria?" Jabez said, very perplex. "Excuse me for being bold and asking, Davy Jones, but where is the wisdom of that?"

"Why, Jabez," Davy told him, "the most beautiful girl on any island will spend her time being proud of her beauty and demanding that you notice it, and give her trinkets to show it off. And when age takes her beauty away, she'll most likely be miserable and make you miserable too."

"Hmm," said Jabez, who had noticed in Susan a certain fondness for pretty earrings and other such gadgets.

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"And the second most beautiful girl will be rueful because she's not first. She'll ask for even more geegaws and trinkets. And as for the third most beautiful girl—she'll spend the most time of all in front of her mirror, doing things to her face and hair and trying to outshine the others. And she'll want even more pretties to make people notice her. Do you follow me, Jabez?"

Jabez did. It was indeed wisdom that Davy Jones spoke.

"Who then shall I marry?" he asked. "How can I hope to pick the right girl out of all the girls on the island? Polly has a sharp temper and Lettie talks too much and Sally—"

"The last bit of wisdom is this," said Davy. "Marry the girl who thinks you are the handsomest man on the island, the girl who thinks you are bravest and smartest and finest of all. Then you can be sure you're right. For she will spend her time thinking of you and not of herself. Now one last gift for free—you shall always be able to catch exactly the fish you need, no more, no less. But you must work to do it. So be off with you!"

He gave Jabez a thrust in the back with his tremendous hand, and Jabez went flying into the water. He struck hard and went down, down, and still down to a depth he could not calculate. At last he could hold his final breath no longer and all consciousness of life left him.

But I am happy to be able to tell you this was not quite the end for Jabez O'Brien. It is true that he was seen to pop to the surface just off the beach of Fish Island, after being missing for ten mortal days. And his neighbors, having pulled him ashore, knew perfectly well anyone who has been under water ten days must be buried. So they dug him a grave, put him in a coffin, carried him to the churchyard, and waited solemnly while the pastor said some final words over him.

Jabez however, as he figured out later, had just been getting his breath back. For at that point he sat up. Seeing how matters lay, he hopped out of the coffin and refused to let them bury him. He had to fight several of the men, who thought he was acting in an improper fashion, but when he had thrown three of them into the open grave they decided that he was still alive after all, just as he claimed.

In order that the occasion should not be wasted, what with everyone wearing his best clothes, Jabez O'Brien gave a party instead. He paid for it with one of the gold doubloons, found just where Davy Jones had said they'd be. And during the dancing first Susan, then Nancy, then Maria whispered to him that if he wanted to ask a certain question again, he'd get a dif-

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ferent answer this time. But Jabez only looked wise and said absolutely nothing.

Nora Farrington, however, spoke differently. She confided to him how she had wept when his dory had been found, keel up, and him missing. And how glad she was that he was safe, him being the finest and handsomest man on the island. And suddenly Jabez noticed that her mouth was but generously sized, for laughter and kisses. And her green eyes were set well apart so that she could see the world clearly and still like what she saw. Her reddish hair, he perceived, was his favorite color.

So it was Nora he married. From that day on he worked hard at being a fisherman and he always caught fish in just the amount he needed. Nora took good care of his wealth, making sure it was not wasted. And Jabez was famous through all New England as the man who sat up in his coffin after being under water for ten days—for he said nothing about his meeting with Davy Jones, not wanting to be called a liar.

There are times now, it is true, when he wonders if it all really happened. He could test the matter by visiting Mermaid Cove on his birthday night, every tenth year, to hear the ghost of the Lady Isabella sing. But it so happens that with Nora and the children around, and the birthday party they give him, and one thing and another, that's one night he can never get away.

However, there's no denying that he has wealth, wisdom and fame, which make him believe that the visit to Davy Jones' Locker was indeed real. Sometimes it occurs to him that Davy did promise him happiness also, but at the last moment seemed to forget about it. However, he's willing to put that down as a mere oversight, what with Davy having so much on his mind.

The truth is that having married just the right wife, and living exactly the life he wants to live, and having his work rewarded exactly right, with not too much and not too little to show for it, he's happier than any king who ever lived.

But happiness is a queer thing —when you really have it you don't notice it to think about. So if Jabez O'Brien doesn't give Davy Jones his full due it's only because he's human. And will be for a long time yet.

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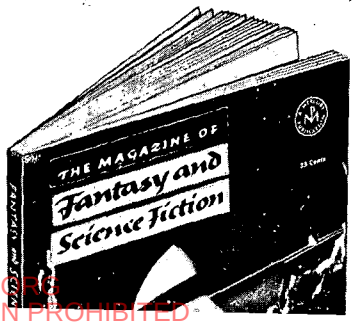

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